

## Chicon V 1991

A convention report by [Evelyn C. Leeper](#)

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Chicon V, the 1991 World Science Fiction Convention, was held August 29 through September 2 in Chicago, Illinois. The attendance was quoted to me by Registration as approximately 5500, with a registration of about 6400. This is just a rough estimate; at no time did the convention newsletter announce the figures, nor did the information desk have any idea, and other sources have claimed that only half of the 5200 pre-registered members attended, plus 400 at-the-door members (totaling 3000, for the mathematically impaired). The latter figure sounds far too low, but the state of the economy certainly made a dent in attendance. (And in sales--Andy Porter said that I was the only person to buy a *two*-year subscription to *Science Fiction Chronicle* rather than a one-year.) The lack of information is a far cry from last year's convention when the statistics by country were in the daily newsletter. The European contingent was much less in evidence than at last year's convention in the Hague, which shouldn't surprise anyone. One attendee from the U.S.S.R. said he left there the day of the coup and in fact spent the first night of the coup in the Moscow airport. The U.S.S.R. fan table was selling science fiction buttons and also old Lenin and Communist lapel pins. I think everyone is trying to unload those.

We arrived in Chicago Wednesday morning and spent Wednesday afternoon at the Oriental Institute and the Museum of Science and Industry, as well as in a couple of bookstores. Thursday morning was the Field Museum of Natural History. However, I will confine my

description to the convention itself. But I will mention that the "five blocks" mentioned in the progress reports from the rapid transit to the hotel was really eight--directions should be double-checked and miles or kilometers are a much more universal measure.

### Facilities

The convention facilities were quite reasonable. I don't know about the overflow hotels, but the two main hotels and main convention facilities were all connected by tunnels, malls, etc., meaning one never had to go outside. (As someone pointed out, the domed city of the future *has* arrived.) If you did go out, there were many restaurants within a fifteen-minute walk, so even though most of the mall's restaurants were closed Sunday and Monday, there was no problem eating.

My only major complaint would be that a ballroom was used for the masquerade and the Hugo ceremony rather than a theater-type room (which provides much better visibility). Yes, the two were broadcast into the sleeping rooms in the Hyatt, but I sort of felt obliged to be physically present at the Hugo ceremony. :-) Having the events broadcast is a good idea; the line waiting for the masquerade Saturday night convinced me I didn't want to stand in it to see the masquerade and so I could go back to my room and watch in comfort. But more about the masquerade later.

Another complaint was that although the Dealers' Room and Art Show adjoined, the connection was blocked off (except for handicapped access) and to get from one to the other required going up an escalator, down a hallway, through the main programming area, and down another escalator. The plus side was that the Art Show was easy to get to from the programming, which may have helped boost attendance.

### Registration

We registered Wednesday night and got our Program Books and Pocket Programs. Chicon used the now-standard technique of putting program participants' schedules on labels on the backs of their badges, but for some reason did not have ribbons for Hugo nominees (and the pins weren't available until the next day). Staff and program participants both had red ribbons; dealers and artists both had green. Staff had red borders on their badges instead of white, but it was still confusing.

Registration managed to run out of Program Books for several hours on Thursday (the books were locked away somewhere), and friends said the procedure was somewhat slow.

Other odds and ends: the badges had clips only--no pins. This is fine for shirts with pockets or lapels, but not so great on T-shirts. The newsletters were late--Thursday's came out between midnight and 3 AM Friday morning and was gone from most spots by 10 AM. Even skipping one of the issues in an attempt to catch up didn't help. The drop-off points seemed to be at the freebie tables which were quite a ways away from all the programming, etc. (though near the Con Suite) and mixed in amongst all sorts of other flyers which were on high counters wrapped around pillars in registration, high enough that I couldn't just glance over but had to make a real effort to see what was what.

There were lots of flyers on the freebie tables, but the days of freebie books and magazines seems largely to have passed, no doubt a victim of the current economic conditions.

### Program Books

The Pocket Program, though done by computer, had no index by participant. (Funny how something can become expected only two years after its introduction. This was specifically

mentioned in last year's gripe session and ConFiction's excuse was a database crash shortly before the convention. Wasn't Chicon listening?) In keeping with last year's convention, the descriptions of the various panels were not in the Pocket Program, though at least the titles were a bit more descriptive than last year. The descriptions in the Program Book were not in alphabetical order, but in semi-chronological order(!), making it almost impossible to find a description for a given panel, or the time when an interesting sounding would happen. And, of course, since the Program Book went to press a while ago, some of the described panels had been canceled and others added in the interim.

In addition, there were other, more substantive errors. The "Phantom of the Opera" panel was listed as "literary" in the Pocket Program, but its description in the Program Book made it clear it was intended as "media" (about the Lloyd Webber play, of course)--or at least that's what the Programming Staff thought. Of course, even there, it was listed as "illusion" (the only item on the "illusion" track, in fact). When I got to the panel, it turned out that they didn't understand the description at all ("The play-within-a-play philosophy of the show and its SFX, physical (real) and psychological"), so it turned out to be somewhat about the book after all. Of course, one panelist wanted to talk about the many versions, several about the many different Lloyd Webber versions only, and one was on because he knew about the special effects in one production! But more of that later.

On the plus side, all major tracks were collated within the Pocket Program (unlike last year, when there was no easy way to see the primary track and the secondary tracks side by side); only children's programming and gaming were separately listed. Most items occurred as scheduled, though items scheduled for two of the six sections of the main ballroom for Saturday and Sunday had to be canceled or moved when those sections were "commandeered" for technical run-throughs of the masquerade and Hugo ceremonies.

On the other hand, some people thought there were more problems with scheduling, cancellations, and maps than I did: Alayne McGregor asked, "Has anyone else noted the similarities between Connie Willis' story 'At the Rialto' and the meeting room assignments at Chicon? I'm thinking particularly of the disappearing L2 floor in the Swissotel."

The maps were adequate, though the print was very tiny, and the connecting path between the two main hotels not shown.

### Green Room

The Green Room at Chicon was perhaps the convention's worst feature (though the masquerade runs a close second). It seemed to lack everything a Green Room needs: a complete schedule, an informed staff, refreshments, organization. Coffee was set out first thing in the morning; at no time after 10 AM could one find all three of coffee, cups, and cream (though sometimes you could get two out of three). When one participant told the staffer there were only two cans of soda left in the tub, the staffer brought out *one* six-pack of cola! (Consider that there were supposed to be a couple of dozen people in there each hour preparing for panels, as well as the usual other participants looking for a quiet place to think.) The Con Suite, on the other hand, was amazing well stocked. If they had just brought some of the stuff from there.... (I'm all for giving the convention at large the goodies rather than hoarding them for the participants, but when I arrived for a late-night panel and couldn't get a cup of coffee to improve my alertness level while con goes in the Con Suite were sucking down the suds non-stop, I think that's carrying it a bit far.)

There was no master schedule indicating what panels were when or where (O NESFA, where are you when we need you?), and the staff said that wasn't their bailiwick--ask program operations (in a different, locked room). Name cards also came directly to the rooms from program operations, so it was always in doubt whether they would arrive either. (They were

nice name cards though.)

### Dealers Room

The Dealers' Room (a.k.a., the Hucksters' Room) was very large, with a lot of books, but also a lot of non-books. Most of what I found, though, was for friends rather than off my own want list--maybe I'm just too selective or something. It was somewhat off the beaten path, being a level down from the Hyatt programming and two levels down from the connecting corridor between the two parts of the Hyatt, but it was centrally located rather than off to one end. The aisles were large enough that you could walk around (and wheelchairs could negotiate as well). I found one book I was looking for, but it was \$100.

Someone pointed out that the index to the Dealers' Room was by dealer's name, not by business' name, so you couldn't look up "Hippogriff, Inc.,"--you needed to know it was owned by "Wu, Juanita." (I made these names up as examples--can't you tell?)

### Art Show

Many people liked the art show a lot. I found that as usual, there was too much cutesy fantasy and "humor" for my tastes (maybe they should set aside a separate area for Star Trek cartoons with punch-line captions, and then I won't go there). The room was large enough though, and it was possible to see the art without tripping over everyone else. The bidding seemed very light (the economy strikes again!) and the auction scheduled for Saturday was cancelled (but that may have been because of the function space muck-ups--see my comments under "Programming").

### Con Suite and Exhibits

As I said before, the Con Suite was well stocked with soda and beer, as well as chips, pretzels, and popcorn. They sometimes had coffee, and occasionally brought in surprise treats (petit fours and such). It was, however, noisy, crowded, and pretty messy--which probably means it was a success. Rumor has it that the free beer in the Con Suite kept the crowds down at the open parties.

The exhibits (History of World Bidding, SF Around the World, and History of the Worldcon) were down the escalator from the Con Suite, near the bidding tables. The Message Board was conveniently located near the main programming area.

### Programming

Given that it's impossible to see everything at a Worldcon, I will cover just the programming I attended. I hope I got all the panelists right, but I foolishly failed to write down the names in the rooms, trusting I could get them from the Program Book later. Bad move--I *know* the "Phantom" panel had closer to seven people than the four listed in the book.

For comparison, the Pocket Program lists about 520 program items, while ConFiction had 337 and Noreascon 3 had 833, not counting films or autograph sessions. The breakdown by type would be roughly 25% readings (123) (honest!), 20% science (102), 17% literary (90), 15% art (73), and the rest distributed among fan (29), academic (18), filk (14), costuming (13), late night (12), media (11), cities (8), and trivia (3), as well as WSFS, SFWA, and other meetings, various ceremonies, and other special events.

There were also 86 films and a full schedule of television programs in their television retrospective (which claimed to have an episode from every televised science fiction show--it didn't, but it was very close).

By the way, this analysis would not be possible (or would be much more difficult) without the help of Bill Higgins, who sent out an electronic copy of the schedule to people a week before the convention. Thanks, Bill!

## Opening Ceremonies

Thursday, 3 PM

These were well-attended, but considerably less classy than last year's (when classical music was played as a platform rose from below the stage revealing the Guests of Honor). Instead, they decided to do the whole thing in a very large ballroom with no microphones (or only one badly placed microphone). They may have tested the acoustics first, but what may have been audible from the back of an empty, silent room was inaudible even part way back in a room full of moving, talking fans. Since the visual part consisted of half-naked men carrying people in on litters, I decided to leave early.

**Panel: See You on the Net: Computer Communities Today and Tomorrow**

Thursday, 5 PM

Evelyn Leeper (moderator), Chris Dunn, Michael Kube-McDowell,

Robert Sawyer, Clifford Stoll, Chuq Von Rospach

Official Description: "Thanks to computer networks, millions now participate in social and professional exchanges using electronic mail. What effect is this having on society? What will happen when the Net is available to almost everybody?"

I was the moderator of this and had contacted most of the panelists ahead of time (via electronic mail, of course), but was a bit worried when four of the five panelists hadn't checked in shortly before the panel and three didn't show up in the Green Room. When we arrived at the room, two of the three missing panelists were there, and Chuq Von Rospach had already sent his regrets because he was arriving too late. Well, we were (mostly) all there, but the microphone wasn't working. I announced finally that the loudest panelists would introduce themselves while we waited for the microphone to get fixed. Someone called out to me, "Use the mike!" so I grabbed the dead microphone, lifted it to my mouth, and said loudly, "Okay. Is this any better?" which got a big laugh. This helped put me much more at ease about moderating a panel.

Well, eventually we got everything working and proceeded with the panel. Though the description said we would be discussing what happened when almost everyone had Net access, we agreed this was unlikely on a global scale--most people don't even have telephones (or television). But we thought it likely that most people who have things like VCRs today would have Net access soon. Stoll described the Net as being populated by people "all the way from chemists to physicists" (which reminded me of "she runs the gamut of emotions from A to B"). This got a laugh--Stoll seemed to have intended it seriously--but it isn't far off in the sense that people with Net access do form a less than totally diverse class (just as the literate did several hundred years ago). Even the non-scientists among them tend to embrace science and technology rather than reject them. Within this subclass, however, there is a diversity of personalities, cultures, and perspectives. We agreed that one of the advantages of the Net is how it provides the ability to communicate with all sorts of people all over the world. (The telephone doesn't do that, especially considering the time differential--when *do* you call someone ten time zones away? And the telephone is intrusive, while bulletin boards and electronic mail wait for you. The postal service is too slow, and neither the postal service nor the telephone has the broadcast capabilities for you to meet these people in the first place.) Stoll, for example, said he received 10,000 to 20,000 messages in response to his book *The*

## *Cuckoo's Egg.*

Wider Net access, then, would seem to imply fewer voice phone calls (though more data calls), and fewer pieces of paper mail (even now, fax is cutting into this area). By not having to handle paper, more information can be transmitted faster. For example, Mark and I do a weekly fanzine with an average of 6 pages a week and a distribution of over two hundred. On paper, this would involve collating, stapling, mailing, etc. Electronically, it's much easier, not to mention the trees being saved. And for those who want a paper copy, they can print it at their end rather than our having to mail the paper. Saul Jaffe does three issues of *SF-Lovers Digest* a day, a number I think would be impossible if he had to print them, especially considering its circulation. (By the way, Nick Simicich (scifi.uucp) has announced a general availability service for *SF-Lovers Digest*; he will send you paper copies of the digest for postage and copying fees; send a check of at least US\$10 to Nick Simicich, P.O. Box 1214, Peekskill, NY 10566 USA and he will send you the Digest until your account runs out. Non-USA residents should send at least US\$20. Get further details from him.)

Given the conclusion that Net access would not be universal soon, we talked more about the pros and cons of life on the Net now, along with some problems of scale. As you might expect, all this has its bad side too. The Net can be a real time sink, especially for authors making their own schedules (according to Kube-McDowell). And the quantity of data--particularly on the unmoderated part of Usenet--can be overwhelming, or as Stoll put it, "a firehose in [your] eyes." Were this all useful data, it would be bad enough, but the signal-to-noise ratio is nearer 10% than 100% (some might say 1% is even closer).

In addition, the relative anonymity of the Net makes "flaming" (violent or abusive criticism of an individual) easier. Even the traditional print media include a columnist's picture at the top of a column or an author's photograph on a dust jacket. This serves to make the author a person and probably tones down the sorts of letters received. The Net has no such capability yet. (One can transmit pictures, but not easily and not in a format everyone can use.) But every cloud has a silver lining and this lack of visual cues also makes the Net very egalitarian. Age, race, sex, handicap--all are unknown (many users use "handles" similar to CB radio that conceal any clues a name might give.).

However, before we all become one big happy Net community, we still have to overcome a few obstacles, such as multiple inconsistent and incompatible networks (people on GENIE can't send electronic mail to people on the Internet, and vice versa) and what one person described as "lousy user interfaces." In regard to the latter, Stoll said his biggest problem was that he used six different networks, each with a different interface. An analogous situation would be if you owned six VCRs, three Beta and three VHS, and all had different ways to program and use them. (Come to think of it, that's not far off the mark. We have three: one requires on-screen programming, one has both on- and off-screen, and one uses a display screen in the hand-held control. One has a timer button; the other two use the on-off button to activate the timer. On one (two?) a second press of the fast-forward button returns the tape to normal speed; on the other(s) you need to press the play button. And so on.)

Of the three hundred or so in the audience, about 60% had "free" access to networks through school or work and about 60% used a pay network such as CompuServe or GENIE. Obviously some had both--20%, since everyone seemed to be hooked up somehow. This was not the case at all panels, though, and a convention with a lot of programming about networking might do well to schedule a "Electronic Networks 101" panel early on to define such terms as "modem," "bulletin board," "sys op," and so on.

It must be mentioned that whatever the limitations of networking may be, the Internet and Usenet were instrumental in helping defeat the recent coup attempt in the Soviet Union, so networking affects even those who are not directly hooked in.

Panel: **How to Unfairly Judge a Book by Page 117**

Thursday, 11 PM

Theresa Nielsen-Hayden (mod), Evelyn Leeper, Laurie Mann,

K. Massie-Ferch, Robert Reed, Amy Thomson, Chuq Von Rospach

Official Description: "Would your favorite novel hold up if you judged it by the first page? How about page 117" (By the way, this description appeared on page 117 of the Program Book!)

There was some discussion beforehand about whether the title meant judging a book on the basis of what was *on* page 117 or what was up to and including page 117. Luckily one person had been on the original Readercon panel which inspired this and was able to confirm it was the former. The technique used was to read all of page 117 of a book and then let the audience and panelists make observations about the book: category, quality, etc. The fact that none of the six of us (alas, I cannot remember which of Massie-Ferch, Reed, or Thomson was not present) had a book with us meant that we had to borrow books from friends in the audience. We started with a couple of mysteries, William Marshall's *The Faraway Man* and Sara Paretsky's *Indemnity Only*. Next was Dave Wolverton's *Serpent Catch*, which did not fare as well in the quality area. I think it was the reference to the Mastodon Men that lost it points. (This was lent to me by a friend whose name will be concealed to protect the innocent--he bought it in the airport and decided early on it was pretty bad.) After I returned home I read that Wolverton had just handed in the *second half* of the novel--not a sequel--to be published soon. I wonder if this was the book that Budrys was talking about in his recent *F&SF* column.

Then came Eluki bes Shahaar's *Hellflower*, written in an odd mixture of high-flown language and colloquial dialogue. Full of words such as "baldrick," it prompted me to reminisce that when I was in school we used to get twenty "Word Wealth" words a week and we had to write a story using all of them--I hadn't realized these stories were getting published now.

Jennifer Roberson's *Sword-Breaker* was described as reading like a high school production of a Shakespeare play, or as Theresa Nielsen-Hayden described it, it had too many speeches of the type "I say thee, nope!"

The question of whether all this was a valid way to judge a book was raised. The consensus was that you have to have some way to judge a book in the bookstore (unless you have infinite money to buy everything and infinite time to read it) and that page 117 was at least as reliable as trusting the cover blurbs or the critic's quotes. I pointed out that this method was only valid with novels, not with non-fiction and not with anthologies or collections. We suggested that if page 117 looked bad, pick another page at random; assuming that page 117 is about one-third of the way through, try one at about 234 or so. I said that there was a series that started out good, but by book seven or so I could pick up a volume, read ten pages at random, and not find the plot being advanced on any of them. (After the audience tried unsuccessfully to guess the series, I admitted it was John Norman's "Gor" series.)

Panel: **Project Cancelled: Glorious Techie Dreams of Yesteryear**

Friday, 10 AM

Arlan Andrews (mod), Laurie Mann, Ken Meltsner,

John F. Moore, John Maddox Roberts, Dave Stein

Official Description: "'A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?' A look at what might have been, from the Analytical Engine to damming the Mediterranean to the nuclear airplane."

The panel started by having the panelists list their "favorite" failed dreams--the ones they would most have liked to see come true. Moore stuck close to real-life projects: MISS (Man in Space Soonest) and a space program called "Dyna Soar." Roberts said he missed holograms and "the city of the future" (though as someone pointed out, we were in it in the Illinois Center, what with the Hyatt's skylight lobby and the enclosed mall surrounding the hotels). Andrews (a former Bell Labs person) wanted fusion power, which the papers had said was forty years in the future. The problem was that it was *always* forty years in the future (though someone said that now they were saying it was twenty years in the future). Meltsner missed robots, especially the "man-mate" sort, including a centaur-like one in which you stand in the front and the back half is robotic. Mann, ever the activist, missed good, reliable, safe birth control.

Stein yearned for walking machines (which he remembered being described under the slogan "Wheels Are Dead!"). Of course, the ones built needed a semi-trailer full of hydraulics to run and could only be operated by women experienced in balancing on high heels (probably even stiletto heels at that time). Even then, they were extremely tiring to use. All sorts of investigations were made for them. For example, the walkers tended to sink into the walkways, so a team was sent out to study moose in the north woods and why they don't sink in the mud. The answer? The moose don't sink in the mud, because the moose don't walk in the mud--they walk around it.

Other failed dreams mentioned included underwater cities (Stein), cities on Mars (Mann), and Arctic cities under glass. Meltsner mentioned cheap and efficient air travel, but said even cheap and efficient postal service would have been nice. (Andrews wanted efficient and swift elevators.) Meltsner also mentioned someone's idea to recycle manure into cattle feed, an idea that failed when the bad bacteria tended to overwhelm the good bacteria used in the process, resulting in a large, smelly mess. Large atomic aircraft failed when not only did the radiation make the entire plane radioactive, but no one would let them land anywhere either. Solar energy and artificial intelligence were also mentioned as dreams of yesterday that did not blossom as people expected. But Mann pointed out that even though traditional AI has failed, almost every home has a computer (if one includes all the electronic watches, calculators, etc., that people of yesterday would certainly have called computers). Maybe it is true: "You can't always get what you want, but sometimes you just might find that you get what you need."

Roberts mentioned the Picturephone (is that still an AT&T trademark?). Others pointed out that video-conferencing is basically Picturephone, and Andrews said that Picturephone itself was making a comeback.

What were the panelists' techie dreams of today that they thought would fizzle out in the next nine years? Moore named the super-conducting collider, and Stein named fusion power. Roberts cited "wetware," and Meltsner thought nanotechnology in general would not achieve expectations. Mann thought the biosphere experiment in the Southwest would not achieve its goals. Everyone agreed that all these failed projects would have spin-offs that we couldn't even dream of now--every cloud has its silver lining.

There was also a discussion of failed economic and political systems (I wonder why?). That Raisa Gorbachev spent twelve years getting a Ph.D. in Marxist/Leninist philosophy was taken as an example of how the future can make obsolete political training as well as scientific training. What else has appeared to fail (or failed to appear)? Controlled anarchy said Stein, and Communism on a large scale said Mann (that's too easy, Laurie). Moore said that the current breakdown of Communism seemed to be the "people asserting their fundamental right to kill other ethnic groups." It was pointed out that the techie dream of networking was part of what

killed the coup: the Soviet Union can't shut down just the civilian phone lines, because they are inter-connected with the military ones, so all the networking traffic couldn't be stopped. And hand-held video cameras can be expected to bring about more cases such as that of Rodney King in Los Angeles.

Andrews pointed out some interesting things about *Star Trek* in this context. It had been claimed to him that science fiction on television was making people more liberal or even libertarian, but a close examination of *Star Trek* showed him that:

- i everyone works for the government,
- i everyone wears uniforms,
- i no one votes in any sort of elections,
- i there is no money, and
- i the examples of free enterprise (no pun intended) we see are Harry Mudd and the Ferengi, neither held up as great examples to follow.

In short, *Star Trek* was reactionary rather than revolutionary.

Returning briefly to the issue at hand (from which we had clearly drifted), two more failed techie dreams of today were mentioned: body sculpturing and major changes in family structures. Though some change in the latter area is in progress, it seems obvious that major changes involving the recognition of group marriages, marriages for a limited time period (at least officially recognized as that from the start), etc., are not in the near-future.

The panelists' want list for future techie dreams was intelligent conversational computers (Stein--I suppose the observation that it's getting harder to find intelligent conversational *people* would be considered catty), matter transmission (Mann--especially for transporting equipment to a con), decent apartment heating and a moderated Usenet (Meltsner), nanotechnology (Andrews--though on another panel someone said they wouldn't trust nanotechnology because "would you want a hardware crash in your pancreas?"), a weight loss pill and a baldness cure (Roberts), high efficiency recycling (Moore). Moore also wanted involuntary education, possibly by injection, which led another panelist to comment that aside from all the civil liberties issues, you would have scenarios where the teacher calls the parents in and says, "I'm sorry, but little Billy is allergic to mathematics" ... and means it!

The mention of L5 colonies led one panelist to observe that most of the people pushing for them, especially at conventions, would never qualify, because in such a small space colonists would need to be clean and polite.

Afterwards, I asked if the modified SCUD missile was a failed techie dream of (Saddam Hussein's) yesterday.

#### Panel: **Fanzines on the Net? (The Future of Fanzines)**

Friday, 12 noon

Tony Ubelhor (mod), Evelyn Leeper, Dick Smith,

Leah Zeldes Smith, Chuq Von Rospach

Official Description: "Alternatives to the written word for fan publications."

(What a silly description! Fanzines on the Net are done almost entirely in the "written word," as artwork is still difficult to transmit. Of course, if they mean *really* written, as with a pen and ink, no fanzine is done that way that I know of.)

Someone on this panel referred to "organized fandom," which was immediately leapt upon as an oxymoron, but it seemed as if the major objection to fanzines on the Net was that fandom there was even less organized than outside the Net. But the major obstacle to communicating on this panel was that the non-net people seemed to be talking about newsgroups, bulletin boards (BBs), special interest groups (SIGs), and so on--not about fanzines. It was difficult to explain in this setting that there were *fanzines*--magazines edited by someone, having distinct issues, sent out on a schedule, and so on. I tried to use the *MT VOID* (our clubzine) as an example: I produce some paper copies for those who have no computer access, but mostly I send out electronic copies that people can print at their end (if they want) rather than having me print them at my end and sending them the paper. The end result is the same, only faster and more convenient.

Newsgroups, on the other hand, are on-going discussions with no deadlines, no editing, and often no content. They merely serve as a useful way to divide up the discussions by topic. I described them as a sort of Dewey Decimal System; Von Rospach said they were more like Dewey Decimal on Drugs.

All this confusion between newsgroups and fanzines merely underscores the need for the "Electronic Networks 101" panel I mentioned earlier.

When we finally did get down to brass tacks, there were a couple of issues raised. One was the motivation for writing in a fanzine. We all agreed, I think, that many people on the Net write more for quantity than for quality, but those of us familiar with electronic fanzines believe (I think) that in the *fanzines* the quality is basically equal to that of "traditional" fanzines. (I would observe in passing that two of the six nominees for Hugo for Best Fan Writer this year are known for their electronic writing as much as for their writing for "traditional" fanzines.) The other problem raised was that of archiving electronic fanzines. But I pointed out that first of all, many are designed to be printed--the electronic medium is only for the faster transmission and the fanzines are unreadable unless you actually print them. Second, many paper fanzines probably suffer the fate of being lost because no one has saved a copy. (Okay, I have the first issue of the UMassSFS fanzine, but I'm an unrepentant pack rat. How many other copies are there around? Yet I suspect that between disk archives, and people who archive paper copies, there will be a lot of electronic fanzines around. The *MT VOID* is two-thirds electronic, yet there are at least four sets of full archives of it.)

I think a more real (and usually unspoken) concern is that now that networking is so widespread, electronic fanzines may completely overshadow "traditional" fanzines. Yet no one (well, hardly anyone) objected when photocopying replaced mimeo or even hectograph. It is much easier to distribute several hundred copies of a fanzine electronically than it is using hard-copy, and circulations in the thousands are not unheard of. It is also true, however, that many of these recipients are not currently in fandom, so fears of electronic fanzines "taking over" the Hugos are, as yet, unjustified. I see these fanzines as enlarging fandom and the fannish community, and I think this is a good idea. I suspect there are those who want fandom to remain small enough for everyone to know everyone else, but I'm afraid it's too late for that. But there will be more commentary on this as this report proceeds.

### **WSFS Preliminary Business Meeting**

Friday, 1 PM

This began with a lot of procedural stuff, followed by a long apology from D A. Martin about why the ballot got released in two pieces. (A preliminary ballot with only three names in most categories was released to *Locus* and CompuServe, then a subsequent ballot with five entries on all categories (and six in one) was released.) The explanation seemed to boil down to the committee saying they gave the preliminary ballot to *Locus* so that Charlie Brown could verify

that all the candidates were eligible, but it wasn't made clear this was only a preliminary ballot. Then someone explained to the ballot-counters that they had misinterpreted the rules and there were really more eligible candidates than they said, but by then the news was out. Why the ballot was posted to CompuServe, and why it is necessary to have an outside source--which as a news magazine has an interest in publishing the list of nominees as soon as possible--verify the ballot was not at all explained, and I hope that in future the committees get their act together on all this.

The meeting then proceeded to set discussion times for various motions, which would actually be discussed at the business meeting on Saturday. First were five amendments passed on from ConFiction (amendments must be ratified by two consecutive worldcons before taking effect). There were also eleven proposed constitutional amendments submitted this year and six standing rule amendments. The debate time for the old amendments was set at times varying from six minutes to thirty seconds (well, they were already debated at great length last year). Of the new constitutional amendments proposed, several were killed outright (including the "Life Hugo for Non-English Language Writing," "A Year Delay on the Hugos," and the "Hugo Fanzine Proposal" regarding electronic fanzines); others had their debate times set for the next day's meeting. Several of the standing rule amendments were also killed ("Partiers' Rights," "Defining 'Session,'" "Editorial Changes," and the "Shut Up Amendment"--don't ask). I didn't stay for the whole session; when the "Hugo Fanzine Proposal" was defeated, I decided to skip the rest and see something besides a business meeting.

This seems like a good place to comment on the "Hugo Fanzine Proposal." It is spoken of as allowing electronic fanzines, but in actual fact the amendment would also have extended fanzine status to audiocassette fanzines for the blind, videocassette fanzines, and so on. The wording, we realize now (and knew even at the time) was awkward, and tried to do too much in one stroke. So next year we will probably try again. To the argument that an electronic fanzine would require a recipient to buy special equipment, I would reply that the same is true of an audiocassette fanzine, a videocassette fanzine, or for that matter a paper fanzine that the publisher would only fax, not mail. You can rent a fax machine at the library or the corner drugstore these days, true, but you can also rent a computer at many libraries. Where does one draw the line? I think most fans would say that an audiocassette fanzine for the blind should be eligible. This alone means that terms have to be redefined. For example, "professional" versus "non-professional" publications are defined strictly in terms of "press run," a concept meaningless when applied to an audiocassette. One part of the proposal, which probably should be split off, would have defined "professional" as having a *circulation* of over 10,000, and in addition paying either its contributors or its staff in other than copies of the publication. (This is in line with the SFWA definition of "professional.") Stay tuned for further developments.

### **Panel: Talk on Phantom of the Opera**

Friday, 5 PM

Julie Zetterberg (mod), Elaine Bergstrom, John Flynn,

Heather Nachman, Bob Tucker

Official Description: "The play-within-a-play philosophy of the show and its SFX, physical (real) and psychological." (This was listed under the "Illusion" track of programming--one wonders who thinks this stuff up.)

Well, as I said before, there was much confusion on what this panel was about. John Flynn was a late addition; he is currently working on a book titled *Phantoms of the Opera*. He wanted to talk about the Leroux novel and all the various film and theater versions, but had a difficult time of it. As he told us later, one panelist said to him, "Oh, good, now we can have a man's

opinion of the sexuality [in the Andrew Lloyd Webber version]!" Bob Tucker was on because he had worked on the stage crew for the Ken Hill version of the story and gave a brief description of how some of the special effects were done for that, but he hadn't seen any other versions that he remembered.

This diversity was reflected in the answers the panelists gave to the question of why they liked the story. Zetterberg fell in love with the Lloyd Webber music rather than the thematic content. Nachman likes the aspect of sexuality, so she is not as pleased with the Claude Rains version (in which the Phantom is more a father figure). The Rains version also suffers (in many people's opinion) by having the Phantom scarred late in life rather than by having him deformed since birth and hence suffering constant rejection all his life. With this change, the story goes from the tale of a man who has never known love or happiness to a tale of simple revenge. Flynn thought the message of not judging what is in a person's soul (or mind) by his or her outward appearance was a very powerful one. He also saw it as an updating of the beauty and the beast story: Eric believes Christine's love would let him lead a normal life, go out riding on Sundays in a coach, etc. Bergstrom was attracted to the idea of the "remaking of the Phantom": how he is changed by his love for Christine.

One problem with the Lloyd Webber production is that the Phantom is made attractive. As someone pointed out, Leroux has him dressed in shabby clothes, looking repulsive, and smelling bad as well. This is a far cry from what is presented by the Lloyd Webber production in any of its venues. Throughout the hour, it was almost impossible to drag the discussion *off* the Lloyd Webber version, even though Flynn had distributed a survey listing eighteen book, theater, and movie versions. No one had seen the Hong Kong version, but I was able to provide some information on the Mexican one (*Fantasma de la Operetta*, with Tin Tan, not to be confused with the Argentinian version made five years earlier, which Flynn did *not* list). Flynn hadn't seen either one, but I was able to direct him to one of the two Spanish-language stations in New York as where the one I saw was broadcast.

Someone in the audience asked about the filming of the Lloyd Webber version. It is apparently on permanent hold as a result of Lloyd Webber and Brightman's divorce. People were divided on the making of this movie, and many (most?) felt that filming the stage production would be better than making a movie. My feeling is that while this is true, a film of any sort would lack the emotional intensity of the play that comes from being physically in the same room as the actors. People agreed with this, but still wanted it made into a film. Why? Well, one answer was, "I want to own it!" This is certainly evidence that videocassettes have changed our attitudes toward performances, and perhaps not for the better. (Yes, I know I "own" thousands of books, and hundreds of movies, but the feeling that the public is *entitled* to own some artist's work does not sit entirely easy with me.) Someone else said they knew a group of monks in a monastery who had heard the music but would never have a chance to see the play unless it was on videocassette. First of all, I doubt that this would be a major factor in someone's decision of whether or not to film the play. But even disregarding that, it seems to me that if the purpose of isolating oneself in a monastery is to get away from the temptations of the world (such as the theater), then bringing in a videocassette of *Phantom of the Opera* is not actually in keeping with the philosophy.

Play: **R. U. R.**

Friday, 8 PM

The Moebius Theatre did a production of Karel Capek's *R. U. R.*, featuring a complete translation by Claudia Novack-Jones. At three hours (with two intermissions), it was considered overlong by many (me included) and I wonder how big an audience it got Saturday and Sunday, when it was opposite the Masquerade and the Hugo Awards ceremony.

I have no other productions of *R. U. R.* to compare this one to, but it seemed as if--at least at the beginning--this production stressed the humorous elements of the play more than was usual. The play seems somewhat dated, though Gregory Winston, who played Alquist, did a reasonable job. Unfortunately, the others were not as good and Joseph Adlesick, Jr., as Gall, seemed particularly overripe, while Alan Ziebarth as Domin was simply not convincing. On the other hand, it's possible that some of the problems arose because they may have been used to playing in a larger room and had gotten used to projecting the gestures and voices more than was needed or desired in the room they were in. Certainly the make-up looked unnatural (at least on the white actors, who looked positively orange).

What may have been needed most, however, was an announcement at the beginning telling everyone to turn off the hourly beeps on their watches!

After the play, we dropped in the Louisville and Winnipeg bid parties for a while and chatted with Laura Resnick (at the former) about her travelogue of Tunisia that appeared in *Lan's Lantern*. Winnipeg had an amazing spread of food: brie, smoked fish, and hot food being cooked by the chef from their Convention Centre. It was clear that all the stops were being pulled out in their attempt to win the bid.

### **WSFS Main Business Meeting**

Saturday, 10 AM

At this session we actually got to vote on some of the items scheduled at the preliminary meeting Friday. There were the usual preliminaries, including the Sergeant-at-Arms producing her mace (courtesy of McCormick's Spice Company). Winnipeg and Louisville presented their bids. Because of the constant interruptions at the preliminary meeting while the parliamentarian referred to *Robert's Rules of Order*, it was requested that the Sergeant-at-Arms peace-bond the book. Elections were held for the vacant positions on the Mark Registration and Protection Committee. (Even for this the Chair had difficulty figuring out how the balloting would work. In general I was unimpressed by the Chair's knowledge of parliamentary procedure--or even by the Parliamentarian's. Where is Bruce Pelz when you need him?)

All five amendments passed on from ConFiction were passed: Best Original Artwork Hugo, Sunshine Amendment, One Person One Vote (a.k.a. "Teddy Bear Amendment"), MRPC [Mark Registration and Protection] Name Simplification ("Liposuction Amendment"), and Amendment Simplification. The rules require that at least one person speak for a measure and one against before a vote could be taken, so most of these went like:

Speaker 1: "I think this is a good idea."  
Speaker 2: "But it could be better."  
Speaker 3: "I move to call the question."  
Chorus of Seconds.

All these took effect at the end of the Business Meeting.

The newer amendments had more discussion. The amendment to change the lead time for site selection to four years was voted down after much discussion centering on the trade-off between the advantage of locking in a hotel versus the ability to hold a committee together for a couple of years of bidding plus four years after winning the bid. The modified amendment regarding the counting of "No Award" votes (which basically requires that when a "winner" is decided using the old method, a check is made to verify that the winner placed *ahead* of "No Award" on more ballots than it placed behind it on) passed. The clarification of the tallying of "No Award" was postponed. The amendment to allow the worldcon to mail the Hugo ballots and rules separately from the WSFS Constitution and pending business was passed, as was the

amendment to call the Hugo Award the Hugo Award (it is actually named the "Science Fiction Achievement Award," but this has been ruled ineligible for registration protection, hence the proposed change). The motion to allow a fan writer to be nominated for writing in generally available electronic media as well as in fanzines was passed. (This really only matters if a fan writer has not been published in any fanzines over the year in question. Both Theresa Nielsen-Hayden and I were probably nominated as much for our electronic writing as for our traditional fanzine writing, but because we have been published in traditional fanzines, we qualify even without this proposed amendment. Still, it's best to clear this stuff up early.) The new amendments that passed must be ratified by the WSFS business meeting at MagiCon to take effect.

### Panel: **SF and the Prophet**

Saturday, 1 PM

Nancy Kress (mod), George Alec Effinger, Doug Fratz, R. A. Lafferty,

Harry Turtledove

Official Description: "About Arabic material in current SF."

Well, the first order of business (as usual) was figuring out what the heck the panel was about. The three guesses seemed to be:

- i SF and Mohammed
- i SF and Kahlil Gibran
- i SF and Predicting the Future

(Admittedly the second one was a dark horse candidate.)

When the official description was read from the Program Book, Lafferty was clearly disconcerted, saying he had signed up to be on the panel thinking it was the third one. (This was particularly unfortunate since he kept referring to Mohammedans and Mohammedanism, two terms that went out of favor years ago. As Effinger commented part way through the hour as politely as he could, Muslims were offended by those terms because the terms elevated Mohammed to a level of implied godhood and this was strictly counter to Islam.) Kress also felt somewhat at sea--though she had written a story set in an Arab culture (*An Alien Light*), she was obviously outclassed by Turtledove and Effinger in terms of quantity (not to mention Turtledove's academic background in Byzantine history).

It's worth pointing out, by the way, that although the "official" topic was Arabic material, the panel expanded it to include all Islamic cultures, while making quite clear the distinction (which seems to have escaped the writers of the Program Book, if you think about it). Islam is spread through most of Africa and much of Asia, while the Arabs are indigenous to the Arabian peninsula and parts of Asia Minor. Even within the Arab peoples there is wide diversity, though. As one panelist pointed out, we have a tendency to think that everyone in another culture is the same, or worse yet, that everyone in *all* other cultures are the same. While it's true that Muslims have a language that holds them together as a culture, they are *not* all the same. (Jews also have this cohesive language: when Mark and I were trying to communicate with a woman in a synagogue in Sofia, Bulgaria, the only common language we had was Hebrew.)

Effinger talked about the difficulties he had with *When Gravity Failed*. Even though he had given the manuscript to a Lebanese friend and an Egyptian friend to make sure he was accurate and did not accidentally offend anyone, Bantam (his publisher) was still nervous. Well, "terrified" is actually the word Effinger used. This was right about the time of the *Satanic Verses* uproar and Bantam insisted on air-brushing out all the minarets in the cover painting! And after all their fears, Effinger got only two negative letters--and one was only objecting to

his wearing an Arab headdress in his photograph on the back cover.

The question was raised about whether non-Muslims could write about Islam effectively, or whether they even had the right to try. I think the consensus was that as long as they tried to be fair, yes. After all, Jews write about Christians and Christians write about Jews. And science fiction traditionally consists of stories about aliens, interstellar travel, and the future written by people who have never met a Russian (let alone an alien), who have never traveled to Mars (let alone another solar system), and who plod along through time at one second per second, just like the rest of us. "Write about what you know" has always been interpreted as "write about what you can learn about" by science fiction authors.

But what was meant by being fair? Lord knows (pun intended) that there is a substantial amount of science fiction today which ridicules fundamentalist Christianity, yet it seems clear that one could not do the same with Islam (or Judaism, for that matter) and expect to get published. (In private conversation, of course, there is much more bashing of minority religions. But it's not considered "politically correct" or "safe"--take your pick--to publish this sort of thing.) Kress pointed out that it is important to show both sides, to have bad characters who are Muslim as well as good, but I think there is still a double standard in how the basic religion is treated. Why this is, why authors and publishers feel one religion is fairer game than another, I leave to more analytical minds. But one answer may lie in an observation I made in my Boskone 26 (1989) convention report, where I asked, "Is it possible that many religions go through a "holy war" phase about 1100 to 1300 years after their inception?" (Interestingly, Turtledove made basically the same observation on this panel, saying that Islam was at the stage Christianity was at about 622 years earlier, that being the difference in starting times of the two. I'm sure the similarity in comments was due to synchronicity rather than influence.) It's probably worth noting that while Christianity went through the Crusades and then the Inquisition during its 11th through 15th Centuries, and Islam is going through similar stages, Judaism went through them as well, only a couple of thousand years ago, during *its* same period (shortly before the Babylonian captivity).

In terms of older works with Arabic influences, the obvious one mentioned was Frank Herbert's *Dune*. I asked about the possibility of seeing works dealing more with Arabic/Islamic elements without a totally Islamic setting, and the panelists seemed to agree that the current dispersion patterns throughout the world, which have resulted in large Muslim populations in such unlikely places as France and London, will also produce their share of science fiction set in future cities in which there is a strong Islamic influence without other cultures being totally absent. This dispersion has also led people to have to alter their incorrect "understandings" of Islam. For example, people used to talk about Muslims praying while facing east, because that was correct for Muslims in Egypt and the Middle East (more or less). But now people are coming to realize that this is incorrect: Muslims pray facing Mecca, which means in Malaysia, for example, they face *west*. And on other planets, one supposes they would face Earth or Sol. (But in what direction would they pray at the antipodal point on Earth? And how do they determine prayer times at the North Pole et al, since prayer time are defined in terms of sunrise and sunset? Of course, these are all problems that Jews face too, and I have a whole file of opinions on this sort of thing if anyone's interested.)

How can we learn more about Arab or Islamic cultures? Well, Effinger said the best way to learn about a culture was by reading its fiction, which was almost always truer to how people lived than the history or other non-fiction works. In the non-fiction books, for example, you hear that everything stops at prayer times in Muslim countries, but in fiction you learn that there are ways people get around the requirements--for example, by traveling (even on a bicycle) at the appointed time, since travelers are exempt. The Nobel prize-winning Egyptian author Nagib Mahfouz was highly recommended. Also recommended was the non-fiction book *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes* edited by Amin Maalouf (published, interestingly enough, by Schocken Books, a pre-eminent Jewish publishing house--but then the Jews didn't like the Crusaders all

that much either).

After this panel we picked up some souvenirs, including the "unofficial" convention T-shirt, which had the Frank Paul "City of the Future" with it labeled as Chicago 1991, etc. We also voted in the site selection, and I even managed to get a "press" ribbon. Why? Because I was reporting on the convention. Where? Why, here, of course!

**Panel: Self-Publishing, Electronic Publishing and All That Scary Stuff**

Saturday, 4 PM

C. Jones (mod), Mike Bentley, Brad Foster, Ann Marie O'Connell,

Andrew Porter, Brad Ross, Mike Ward

In the "Science Fiction and the Prophet" panel, someone observed the tendency of assuming everyone in a particular culture was the same--and how this assumption was wrong. Well, this panel proved that assuming all self-publishers are alike is a mistake also. Foster produced art books. Porter produced a semi-prozine. Ward was working on a project to provide public-domain books to libraries on compact disk. Each had different constraints, different budgets, and so on.

Now that public libraries will rent users a Macintosh with a compact disk drive, the question of equipment is at once easier and more complex. On the one hand, you don't have to invest in a lot of equipment before you get started. On the other, you do need to decide whether to rent or buy, a decision once reserved for houses. In making this decision you might bear in mind what one panelist said: it's cheaper to buy the computer and the drive and transmit the publication electronically than to print up *or* to ship the paper. If you need camera-ready copy, that's easy as well. Even if you produce compact disks, you can save substantially. Of course, the recipient has the choice (dilemma?) of reading from the compact disk on the screen or of printing and binding the output. Still, the compact disk medium has extended possibilities. Consider a compact disk that had text and music. (Ursula K. Le Guin's *Always Coming Home* tried this, but had to do it by boxing a book and a cassette together.)

Networking has its disadvantages and pitfalls to the unwary, of course. For example, Porter says people keep asking him to upload *Science Fiction Chronicle*, because then they could "get it for free"--clearly not what Porter has in mind. I merely observed that the next time he wrote that he had to raise the subscription price because the postage rates were going up, he should remember that if he could transmit *Science Fiction Chronicle* electronically and get people to pay for it, he could charge less and make the same net profit (no pun intended)--in fact, he could charge less and make *more* profit.

But this "Heroic Age of Information Retrieval" (as Ward termed it, since he sees us as brave trail-blazers inventing from scratch the tools that this new age will need) has some limitations which may not be apparent to anyone still marveling over the recent reconstruction of the unpublished Dead Sea scrolls from the published concordance. For one thing, you could always publish just about anything, even with just a typewriter and a copier; it's distribution that's the bottleneck. There is some improvement in this area; electronic bulletin boards let you reach a larger, more focused group than ever before. But the major limitation is skill, or as Ross summed it up, "If you can't figure out how to do it with paper and pencil, you can't do it with a Mac either."

**Masquerade**

Saturday, 8:30 PM

The enormous line snaking through the Hyatt shortly before the initially scheduled starting time convinced us to watch the Masquerade over the closed circuit television in our room--or rather, in a friend's room, as our television reception was not very good. Going up, we discovered that the Con staff already had elevator monitors (a.k.a. "elevator Nazis") in place to make sure that everyone got to use the elevator in their proper turn. (This usually includes making everyone exit on the first floor, so that people can't get into a down elevator on the second floor and then stay in to go up, basically cutting in front of everyone else.) When I mentioned the monitors to Mark, his comment was, "We control the vertical--up! We control the vertical--down!" (*Outer Limits* fans will get the joke.) Because of this, I decided to walk from our room on the tenth floor up to our friend's room on the nineteenth (stopping briefly at the Readercon party on the 16th on the way) rather than try to fight any crowds.

The Masquerade was initially scheduled to start at 8:30 PM, but this was changed at some point to 9 PM (though I don't recall seeing much advertising of that fact). The Children's Masquerade (the first part of the Masquerade as a whole) actually started at 9:20 PM, followed by a ten-minute intermission at 9:30 PM, followed by the presentation of the certificates for the Children's Masquerade. Mike Resnick as Master of Ceremonies did his best to fill all the blank time, but having the actual Masquerade start so late did not bode well.

Because we were in our room, we didn't get Masquerade programs, so I don't know how many entries there were. We had seen thirty-six by 11:20 PM, when we gave up and headed out for the parties; the first run-through didn't finish until after midnight (Constellation, anyone?). One thing that made it take so long was that everyone felt obliged to do a skit or have some sort of dramatic reading. The entry "Cats," in fact, was closer to a music video than a costume. Mark described this sort of thing last year as "costuming for the visually impaired." I yearn for a Masquerade in which there is no sound system other than the Master of Ceremonies' microphone and dramatic readings consist of the costume name, costume origin, and participants' names.

The costumes were better than last year's (not all that difficult, I admit) and formed a mixed bag. Some were very good, others very bad (large people can look good, but a costume that leaves them half-naked is usually not the best approach--and as someone pointed out, "Nudity is not a costume"), and some just strange. There was a very well crafted costume which was Egyptian from the neck up, Japanese from the neck down, and titled "Medea." Mark looked at it and spoke the thought uppermost in all our minds: "What the fuck is this?"

After the first run-through, there was the usual intermission for the judges to farble. There was a professional comic for about forty minutes, but then Resnick, who had been told he might have three or four minutes to fill, found himself filling more like forty, while the judges farbled some more. Eventually, the agony was over. However, I can't report the results, because a full list of winners was never published in the newsletter, but "Octopus' Garden" won three awards, including People's Choice and Best of Show. The Judges' Choice was "The Lover of Mirrors."

At the ConFrancisco party someone said, "The Masquerade staff stormed into Program Ops [this morning] and demanded they cancel two sections of ballroom programming so they could do a run-through," to which my immediate response was, "I've seen no evidence of that so far this evening." And indeed, the technical problems were legion: bad sound, bad lighting, bad color transmission, bad timing, ....

We also went to the @ party, where we spent a couple of hours talking to people. I spent most of my time in the back room talking to Cliff Stoll. This was his first convention and I was curious what he thought of it. He thought it was "interesting" (a word that covers a multitude of sins). In particular, he found it quite a change from technical conferences in that when someone asked a question at a talk or panel, it could be a speech rather than a question, and it didn't always have anything to do with the topic at hand. I got the impression he was not going to

become a regular con-goer. *The Cuckoo's Egg* has been optioned for a movie, but Stoll and the script writer are arguing about how accurate it should be. For a change, the script writer is pushing for more accuracy and Stoll wants to see it changed to liven it up. Don't worry, Cliff, that will come in time.

Kimi Tipton did a great job with the party. Thanks, Kimi! (Except she never did publish the list of attendees, or their comments.)

Panel: **Books-Movies-Books**

Sunday, 10 AM

George R. R. Martin (mod), B. Froman, Thorarinn Gunnarsson,

Mark Leeper, Craig Miller, Richard Meyers, Melinda Snodgrass

Official Description: (none)

In addition to the scheduled moderator not being present, this panel was on a table split in the center by a large podium and there was only one microphone. Even with a volunteer to pass the microphone around this obstruction, there were serious logistical problems.

The proposition put forth at the beginning of this panel was that most movies adapted from books are not very good. This proposition led people to speak more in defense of adaptations than usual. For example, someone pointed out that *A Clockwork Orange* was a good movie, even though it was very different from the book. On the other hand, Martin said that while "*Bladerunner* turned Philip K. Dick over a few times, ... *Total Recall* made it a blur."

Leeper got his turn at the microphone and, knowing once he relinquished it to the far end of the table he would never see it again, gave a list of films (with comments) that he said were at least as good as the sources that inspired them: *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *Carrie*, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, *High Noon*, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, and *The Maltese Falcon* (though Meyers disagrees on the last). Other people named a few more: *Jaws*, *Psycho*, *Dangerous Liaisons*.

Of course, there were many more examples of good books gone bad, but it was pointed out that panels such as these often went wrong by slamming the method by which books are made into movies. This may be of some interest, but the real question is whether the *result* (the movie) is good or bad. Gunnarsson also noted that on panels such as these, people praise the writers and criticize the directors because it's the writers who are attending the convention.

Looking at the flip side, I asked why Hollywood so often produces a novelization of a movie that was based on a book to begin with. The primary reason, it seems, is that there have usually been enough changes to the original story that they want to have a book that is close to the movie. Why? Because people want a "paper videocassette," as one panelist put it. Sometimes this can lead to quite unusual results: when *The Island of Dr. Moreau* came out, one company re-issued the original novel at the same time it issued the novelization. But this need to have the book match the film is certainly one of the motivating forces behind such novelizations as *Bladerunner*, which was almost totally unlike *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

Then there are the times that the novelization is actually co-written with the movie: Orson Scott Card's *The Abyss*, Isaac Asimov's *Fantastic Voyage*, Fritz Leiber's *Tarzan and the Valley of Gold*, Ellery Queen's *A Study in Terror*. (Someone accidentally pronounced *Abyss* as *A Bris*, leading another panelist to say, "Yes, that was the shorter version.")

Sometimes the marketing department makes strange demands. Before the film *Dick Tracy* came out, the makers didn't want anyone to know the identity of the killer. So the first printing of the novelization had no ending. Only after the film was released and the second printing came out was the killer revealed in the book.

Writing a novelization may sound easy--after all, you have all the dialogue, so you just need to fill in a bit here and there, maybe add some descriptions, right? Well, that's what Simon Hawke thought, but Snodgrass and Martin told the story of how he discovered his error. Hawke was called to do the novelization for *Friday the 13th: Part 6*. He had never done one before, but the money was good, so he figured he'd have an easy time of it. How long did he have? One week. This did sound a bit tight, but he plunged bravely ahead: "Sure, send the script." So he got the script and started looking for the dialogue he would be writing around. And he found:

(Close-up, hockey mask)  
(Cut to medium shot of Suzie, running)  
(Cut to close-up of axe, gleaming)  
(Cut to close-up shot of Suzie, screaming)  
(Cut to medium shot of Jason, running)

and so on ... well, you get the idea. Anyway, Hawke realized he was in trouble, so he called back and asked whether he could add some characterization or something. "Characterization? Sure, I guess so." So Hawke did in fact manage to produce a novelization, but Martin wanted the audience to know that 1) any characterization in it was from Hawke and not from the movie, and 2) it's not as easy as it looks.

By the way, currently there are two versions of *The Puppet Masters* going forward, one moderately faithful to the book and the other wildly divergent, because the people in charge can't decide which they like better.

After this, I was going to go to another panel, but instead got involved in a conversation with Connie Willis, Martha Soukup, and another fan. I told Willis that after I read "Cibola" I happened to go into New York City at sunset and saw for the first time what she described (though I'm sure I had "seen" it before, if you catch my drift). She said that that was part of science fiction: making people see the same things differently. She also talked about her work a bit-- she enjoys the humor she writes, but that isn't what she works the hardest at. She also said that it's amazing what will offend some people: she had physicists who were offended by "At the Rialto" and a dinosaur story she wrote was rejected because it might offend paleontologists. (At least I think that was she, though in the back of my mind a voice is telling me I might be confusing this with something Robert Silverberg said in one of his panels.)

I mentioned to Soukup that I tried to find her story to read for the Hugo ballot, but given that *Amazing* was subscription only (at least at that time) there were no copies to be found. She handed me a photocopy and said that a lot of people had said the same thing. I suppose that it got nominated means that among its readership it made a stronger than average impression, since its starting readership was smaller than for most other stories.

#### Panel: **Small Press Issues**

Sunday, 12 noon

Greg Ketter (mod), Chris Edwards, Robert Garcia, Andrew Kyle,

Andrew Porter, J. Simner, Mark Ziesing

Official Description: (none)

The first thing said was that the term "small press" is relative: in England Mark Zeising would be a major publisher. An attempt to define "small press" met with little success, and even trying to list some characteristics of a small press were unsuccessful. For example, one person claimed that small press books were more expensive. Perhaps sometimes this is true, but Mark Zeising's books at US\$25 are just about the same as hardbacks from large presses, and Pulphouse's "Author's Choice" series of trade paperback collections at US\$4.95 matches standard mass-market prices and is *cheaper* than other trade paperbacks. And certainly styles differ: the panel felt there was a world of difference between the laid-back style of Zeising and the frenetic approach of Darrell Schweitzer (whose standard greeting is "Can I sell you one of my books?"). One panelist ventured a guess that Schweitzer makes more than 50% of his sales through personal contact.

Discussions of the role of the small press were more productive. Zeising like to publish books for authors he likes and books he believes in. Since he needs to pick and choose and work closely with an author, he sees no need to be a masochist and work with people he doesn't like. Greg Ketter was mentioned as working to bring Lafferty back into print (is this United Mythologies?). Some small presses do specialize in one or two authors: Arkham House with H. P. Lovecraft, Underwood-Miller with Jack Vance. This approach helps build up sales, and other publishers have used limited editions of big-name authors to do likewise.

Desktop publishing has been a big help to small presses, but distribution is still a problem. (Much of this panel runs together in my mind with the panel on "Self-Publishing, Electronic Publishing and All That Scary Stuff," so forgive me if I have mixed some of the ideas. As you can imagine, many of the concerns were similar.) Dick Witter's F&SF Book Company helped a lot in getting small press items out to the specialty stores, and now small presses are using the comic book distribution network as well. Collection problems abound though, and every panelist had some horror story about a distributor that left him or her in the lurch.

In spite of their vested interest in the small press world, the panelists said that beginning authors should set their sights high. (Even those involved in the small press magazine market said this.) "Start at the top," they said, "and don't be afraid of the marketplace." Ted Chiang did. He sold his first story, "Tower of Babylon" to *Omni* and it went on to win a Nebula and get nominated for a Hugo, whereas if he had sent it to *Fred's Minizine* it would never have been seen by most people.

Some small press magazines "graduate" into the larger press. Fred Clarke's *Cinefantastique* five years ago had newsstand sales of 20,000; now it sells 40,000 on the newsstands. (And when Mark and I started reading it, back with issue #1, it had considerably less!) But he was able to do this by having a considerable cash buffer before he went to a distributor, because it takes several months for the cash to start flowing back. In addition, the average return rate for newsstands is 70% (I suspect for something like *Cinefantastique* it's lower). The only reason that newsstand distribution pays off is that it generates subscriptions. In fact, only five magazines make a profit on their newsstand distribution: *TV Guide*, *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, *The Weekly World News*, and something else. (Initially the panelist just gave the number. I asked which ones and got the response I indicated, but I have this feeling that "five" may not be accurate either. Let's just say few manage to turn a profit on the newsstand.)

Just as Brad Ross had said earlier that technical tools won't help you if you don't have the know-how, Kyle observed that "just because you're wearing a white smock and carrying a knife doesn't make you a surgeon." Just because you're producing *something* does not make you a small press publisher.

**Panel: What's the Difference Between Magical Realism and Fantasy?**

Sunday, 2 PM

Eric Van (mod), Michael Kandel, Mary Rosenblum, Mary Zambreno

Official Description: (none)

Any good panel discussing the difference between two terms would start by defining their terms. In this case, it was (as someone once described something) "like trying to nail Jell-o\('-.5m\')s-2\('tm\')s0\('v'+.5m' to the wall." (Well, actually, I doubt that he or she spoke the \('-.5m\')s-2\('tm\')s0\('v'+.5m' part, but one can't be too careful these days.) The panelists never tried to define fantasy, assuming that the audience had at least some idea of what it was, and also assuming (correctly, I think) that since many people consider magical realism a subset of fantasy the real question was "What is magical realism?"

Van quoted Darrell Schweitzer as having said, "Magical realism was invented by academicians who don't want to use the 'F' word." Van also quoted David Hartwell as claiming that the academic definition was that magical realism was fiction that was Latin American, that was political in nature, and that had Christian symbolism. I immediately had a problem with this--defining a type of fiction as having to come from a particular area seems like a bad start. And indeed many of the authors cited as magical realists were not Latin American: John Crowley, Italo Calvino, Mark Helprin, Jose Saramago (who is Portuguese, not Latin American), included Thomas Pynchon, Philip K. Dick, and William S. Burroughs. I mentioned Isaac Bashevis Singer, pointing out that he wasn't Latin American and didn't use Christian symbolism, but certainly *felt* like a magical realist. And there were individual works from other non-Latin-American authors: Michael Kandel's *In Between Dragons*, Pat Murphy's *Falling Woman* (well, it does have a Latin American setting), James Morrow's *Only Begotten Daughter*, W. P. Kinsella's *Shoeless Joe*, Jorge Amado's *Don\*a Flor and Her Two Husbands* (Amado is Latin American), John Fowles's *The Magus*, and Orson Scott Card's "Prentice Alvin" books. Films cited were *Eraserhead* and *Twin Peaks*.

One suggestion was that magical realists put more stress on the human condition than fantasists do, but this sounds a lot like the old "If it's good it can't be science fiction" argument dressed up in fantasy clothes. Another proposal was that magical realism showed some magic thing coming into the world and it was good rather than evil. A modification of this was that there was something magic that people just accepted; the "magic-ness" wasn't the focus of the novel. (In Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, people don't spend a lot of time marveling about how Samsae changed into a cockroach--they just accept it and go from there. For that matter, is all this dividing up really worthwhile? Where, for example, does one put Kafka?) But the latter point seems to be connected with the use of Christian symbolism, since Christianity is concerned with faith and belief. Another aspect was magical realism's "sense of place," also notably present in the current crop of "urban fantasy" novels.

A more practical approach--and possibly every bit as valid--is that magical realism is anything marketed with a white binding, the top third of the front cover white with black lettering, and a picture of a jungle on it. While this reduces magical realism to a marketing category rather than a genre, it is at least a workable definition.

Someone observed that some people need fantasy to make something interesting, and some don't--fantasy is *not* an acquired taste. (I'm not sure how this fit into the discussion, but it's interesting nonetheless.)

Zambreno may have suggested the best answer: magical realists know that *all* novels are fantasy; fantasy writers don't.

### Non-Hugo Awards

never

Alas, there was no non-Hugo award ceremony this year. Last year ConFiction arranged a special ceremony for the Gigamesh Awards (Barcelona), Seiun Awards (Japan), King Kong Awards and King Kong Service Medal (The Netherlands), and the ASFA Chesley Awards. Unfortunately, the ceremonies were very poorly attended, even by the European fans, and rumor has it that some of the Japanese contingent left in a huff because the Seiuns (previously awarded at the Hugo Awards ceremony) had been relegated to this separate and largely ignored (by the attendees, anyway) program item. So the rest of the awards disappeared from the programming altogether and the Seiuns were back in the Hugo ceremony. (Best short story in translation was George Alec Effinger's "Schro\\*:dinger's Kitten"; best novel in translation was David Brin's *The Uplift War*; best dramatic presentation was *Ginga-Uchu Odyssey* which was scripted by Gregory Benford. Ironically, the Hugo Award ceremony program booklet had a misprint which left "Schro\\*:dinger's Kitten" off and had George Alec Effinger listed as the author of another story which was actually by a different author. There was an announcement of the winners of the Prometheus (Libertarian) Awards in the daily newsletter; these were awarded Sunday at 6 PM as announced in a small item in the daily newsletter (after being previously announced for Saturday at 5 PM), and the winners were F. Paul Wilson for *An Enemy of the State* (Hall of Fame Award) and Michael Flynn for *In the Country of the Blind* (Best Novel).

## Hugo Awards

Sunday, 9 PM

First the awards:

- i Novel: *The Vor Game* by Lois McMaster Bujold, Baen Books
- i Novella: "The Hemingway Hoax" by Joe Haldeman, IASFM April 1990
- i Novelette: "The Manamouki" by Mike Resnick, IASFM July 1990
- i Short Story: "Bears Discover Fire" by Terry Bisson, IASFM, August 1990
- i Non-Fiction Book: *How to Write Science Fiction and Fantasy* by Orson Scott Card, Writer's Digest Books
- i Dramatic Presentation: *Edward Scissorhands*, 20th Century Fox
- i Professional Artist: Michael Whelan
- i Professional Editor: Gardner Dozois
- i Semiprozine: *Locus*, Charles Brown
- i Fan Artist: Teddy Harvia
- i Fan Writer: David Langford
- i Fanzine: *Lan's Lantern*, George Laskowski
- i John W. Campbell Award: Julia Ecklar
- i First Fandom Award: Robert A. W. Lowndes
- i Big Heart Award: Julius Schwartz
- i Special Awards: Elst Weinstein for the Hokus, Andrew Porter for *Science Fiction Chronicle*

(The last four are not Hugos.)

Now my comments: At least First Fandom is down to one award per year (over the preceding three years they gave out ten!). Fred Pohl, the presenter, also did us all a favor and named the recipient before giving the biography, which saved us all trying to guess who it was. In Andy Porter's acceptance speech, he said if people wanted to find out what was wrong with the Hugos they should read his next column--a bit ungracious, by most people's comments afterward. I think the biggest surprise was that *The Vor Game* won, since most people seemed to assume it would be either *Queen of Angels* or *Earth*.

The Hugo this year was acrylic on a marble base and designed by Todd Hamilton.

Marta Randall, the mistress of ceremonies, previously held the record for the shortest Hugo Ceremony (90 minutes). She wanted to beat it, but the addition of the Seiun Awards into the ceremony made that impossible. By the way, she referred to the Seiuns as the "Japanese Hugos," an incorrect use of the Hugo name, and I assume the Mark Registration and Protection Committee will mention this to future presenters to avoid this.

Marta Randall also had some humorous comments about the fiction categories, claiming that the short story was the pinnacle of achievement, and developing that theme. For example, when she got to the novelette category, she described a novelette as "the first step of the wholesome all-American short story toward a bloated dekology." Coincidentally (at least I think it was coincidentally), the presenters got larger in size as the categories increased in word count, a fact that was pointed out with some amusement by George R. R. Martin (the novella presenter): Martin claimed that if this was planned, then Gardner Dozois must be presenting the award for novel (he wasn't). In his acceptance speech for the novella version of "The Hemingway Hoax," Joe Haldeman said that people had asked if they should buy the novel if they already had the novella and he wanted to assure them that the only difference between the novella version and the novel version was that for the novella version he had cut 15,000-20,000 words of explicit sex from the novel. (No one reported if there was a run on the novel in the Dealers' Room the next day.)

After the Hugo Awards ceremony, we proceeded to the parties of the evening. First, of course, we went to the Hugo Losers' party (although a few of the winners snuck in as well). MagiCon gave each nominee a coffee mug inscribed "MagiCon / Hugo Nominees Party / Chicon V / September 1, 1991"; last year Chicon gave out drink coasters with rockets needlepointed on them. At this rate of escalation, I figure the 1995 worldcon will be giving out table service for six and the 1996 one will give you the china cabinet to keep it in. :-) I had a good time talking to people, but the room was much more crowded than the one last year (which had been about four times the size, with fewer attendees). I helped staff the door for a while, since this was a closed party. People seemed determined to crash this party, and tended to arrive in groups, with one program participant (it was open to program participants as well as nominees--maybe this was why it was so crowded) bringing in four "guests." After a couple of minutes, the participant would leave, but the guests would remain. One participant apparently did this twice, but the door crew then decided he was not allowed back a third time even if he was a program participant. Other people said they were just looking for someone, but frequently when we kept an eye on them we discovered them picking up a drink and blending in once they got in. (They were then politely asked to leave.) Perhaps it was the announcement of this as being open to program participants as well that caused the crashers to appear, since that required a much wider publicity than had it been nominees only. (I'm not trying to be a party-poofer here, but MagiCon budgeted for a certain number of attendees, no doubt to give them good feelings about MagiCon and encourage them to be participants there as well, and it isn't fair to MagiCon to ask them to pay for a bunch of other people who are not going to reciprocate. And there were other, open parties.)

After this, we also dropped in on the Phantom of the Opera party. (Actually, Mark spent a fair amount of time here while I returned to the Hugo Losers' party, and he got to talk at length to John Flynn.) Heather Nachman and others had spent a lot of time decorating their room in a "Phantom of the Opera" theme, complete with fallen chandelier. I hope someone took pictures. A lot of people were dressed in suitable costumes (I guess my tuxedo might even count in that category), though again the emphasis was on the Lloyd Webber version. It wins my prizes as Best Theme Party and Best Decorated Party!

**Panel: Can We Reach Vinge's Singularity? The Meaning of Exponential Progress**

Monday, 1 PM

Dale Skran (mod), Jim Baen, Bill Higgins, Chip Morningstar, Tom Van Horne

Official Description: "Vernor Vinge suggested that the increase of knowledge and innovation will go ever faster until civilization suddenly breaks through into an unguessable new state. Is this inevitable? Are there forces that will slow progress down? Or will new pressures always arise to increase the pace of change?"

Skran started by pointing out that although this was a panel on Vernor Vinge's Singularity, neither Vinge nor Marc Stiegler (author of "The Gentle Seduction," another work of fiction dealing with the same ideas as Vinge's) was on the panel. Vinge himself has pointed to other works as promoting or using the same idea, notably Greg Bear's *Blood Music*.

So what is Vinge's Singularity? Well, the panel did not do a very good job of defining it, but I'll try to summarize what they said. In Vinge's works (*Marooned in Real Time* and *The Peace War*), he has a mechanism that freezes people and their immediate surroundings in "bobbles" in time and eventually they pop out in the far future. A bunch of people who have been through this discover that, as the time they were encapsulated progresses, the technology that they have and understand increases exponentially. That is, while someone encapsulated in 2000 is advanced beyond someone encapsulated in 1995, someone encapsulated in 2001 is even further advanced beyond the 2000 person, and so on. Eventually it is true that a difference of even a few days makes a major difference in level. And one more thing--all human life seems to have disappeared from Earth at a certain point in time (sometime in 2015, I think). This is the Singularity and the disappearance aspect has led some people to name the Singularity the "Techno-Rapture."

This disappearance is *not*, however, what the panelists were talking about, but rather the notion that technology and knowledge could advance so fast that there would come a time when "all things not impossible are possible" or when people on the other side of the singularity become incomprehensible to us. I'm not sure what this means and clear explanations were not forthcoming. The latter implies that people would "cross" the singularity at different times, but I don't know if that was intended or not. At any rate, to keep *my* terms clear, I will use "singularity" (lower case) to mean the technological break-through and "Singularity" (upper case) to mean the "Techno-Rapture."

Now that you have this definition, you can understand why people in the audience named such works as Arthur C. Clarke's "Nine Billion Names of God" and Robert A. Heinlein's "Year of the Jackpot" as having similar themes. (Assuming you've read them, of course, but since they're classics if you haven't read them you should.)

Skran and Higgins started to list eleven forces that could prevent the singularity from happening. This was probably a mistake, since I think many in the audience still didn't have a clear idea of what the singularity was. They got as far as institutional inertia and market inertia before the discussion veered off entirely. One force leading towards the singularity was the increasing speed of communication, mentioned before in many other panels, and which Higgins pointed out meant that "your jokes are [no longer] new to most people." Someone else pointed out that if the singularity was being considered as the knee of the curve in a chart showing exponential growth (which people had referred to earlier), than by changing the scale of the axes you can move the knee around. Do you start your time axis at 1950? 1900? 1500? 5,000,000 B.C.E.? And what is the metric on your "technological" axis? To the Middle Ages, it might have been books printed, but as more and more information becomes electronic this becomes less meaningful. So what is the metric?

Things got fuzzier and fuzzier. Panelists claimed the singularity could be some dramatic increase in intelligence through technology (sounds almost like Poul Anderson's *Brain Wave*--though that didn't use technology--or Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon*), or it could be some

simple breakthrough such as happened when people switched from Roman to Arabic numerals. In regard to the former Van Horne pointed out that "before you make someone smarter, you have to understand what makes them smart."

Two more forces opposing the singularity were mentioned (they never got anywhere near listing all eleven): fear of technology and the distraction of virtual realities. The former was hotly discussed, with many people, including some of the panelists, that a fear of technology did not necessarily make someone a mindless Luddite, and that recent events at Three-Mile Island, at Prince William Sound, and at innumerable other places would lead even the most technophilic amongst us to be justifiably wary of unrestrained and uncontrolled technology. As Baen said, "Any technology is dangerous." As the power of the technology increases, its danger also increases, or rather, its potential for damage increases. The other complaint (about virtual realities) seemed, to me at least, to be just the latest incarnation of the protests we have seen for thousands of years about how the world is going to hell in a hand-basket. Three generations ago, jazz was ruining the younger generation. Then it was rock 'n' roll and television that were the villains. Then it was video games. Now it's virtual realities, in the form of realistic video games in which you feel as if you are in the game, that will do progress in. I remain skeptical.

The Fermi Paradox was raised. (The Fermi paradox asks why, if the universe is so hospitable to intelligent life, we haven't found any other intelligent life-forms yet. Why haven't they contacted us?) I forget if there was any connection between this question and the ostensible topic, but Morningstar did have an answer: no one has contacted us because they're all off reading netnews.

### Miscellaneous

The hotel had an automatic check-out through the television, but it was not working (or overloaded). Luckily we had requested a copy of our bill earlier (before breakfast) so we could divide up the cost, so we were able to just drop off the keys at their "Express Check-Out" and go.

As usual, I'll list the Worldcons I've attended and rank them, best to worst (the middle cluster are pretty close together, and it's getting harder and harder to fit the new ones in, perhaps because the cons of fifteen years ago are hard to remember in detail):

- Noreascon II
- Noreascon III
- Noreascon I (my first Worldcon)
- Midamericon (on the basis of the film program, perhaps)
- LACon
- Chicon V
- Discon II
- Seacon
- Confederation
- Chicon IV
- ConFiction
- Conspiracy (mostly due to hotel problems)
- Iguanacon (partially done in, in my opinion, by politics)
- Suncon (the location change from Orlando to Miami didn't help)
- Nolacon II (extremely disorganized)
- Constellation (they over-extended themselves)

In a hard-fought battle, Winnipeg won the bid for 1994. 2107 votes were cast: 1012 for Winnipeg and 957 for Louisville. 719 were mail-in votes and 1388 were cast at Chicon V. It took fourteen hours to count the ballots because Chicon had failed to validate any of the mail-in ballots (verify that each voter was a member of Chicon V and had paid his or her voting fee), or any of the ballots cast at the convention. In addition, it took a while to get a hard-copy of the

Chicon V membership list to do validation against. In any case, the results were available in time (though barely) from the Sunday WSFS business meeting. Anne McCaffrey, George Barr, Barry B. Longyear, and Robert Runte are the Guest of Honour. (This switching back and forth between "Honor" and "Honour" is getting to me!) The convention will be called Conadian and be from September 1 through September 5, 1994. Next year's contest is a two-way race for 1995: Atlanta and Glasgow.

Next year in Orlando!

[I would like to add that while I did have videotapes of several of the panels, I decided not to watch them again to write this. There were two reasons for this. The first is that I would need to spend an hour to watch a one-hour panel--one can't skim a videotape. The second is that, given a videotape in front of me, I would have been tempted to be even more thorough, and at 16,000 words, this con report is long enough already!]

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