

Conspiracy '87
Con report by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Table of Contents:

[Hotels](#)

[Hucksters' Room](#)

[Programming](#)

[Panel: British Made \(or What Is British SF?\)](#)

[Talk: Great Figures of Science Fiction: H. G. Wells](#)

[Film: 99-and-44/100% Dead](#)

[Talk: The Case for Optimism \(or Why We Just Might Be Living in a Renaissance\)](#)

[Panel: Great Figures of Science Fiction: Olaf Stapledon](#)

[Film: War of the Satellites](#)

[Presentation: "Superman": The 50-Year Slide Show](#)

[Film: The Element of Crime](#)

[@ Party](#)

[Art Show](#)

[Panel: The Horror, the Horror, the Horror](#)

[Panel: Bones Cracked, Blood Spurted As He Edited Out the Violence](#)

[Panel: When Were the Golden Years of SF Movies?](#)

[Panel: Tomorrow Belongs to the Illiterate](#)

[Masquerade](#)

[Film: Death Line](#)

[Panel: Rockets and Rayguns \(What Has the Space Race Achieved?\)](#)

[TV Show: Colonel March Investigates](#)

[TV Show: The Adventures of Dr. Fu Manchu](#)

[Guest of Honor Film Show & Interview: Ray Harryhausen](#)

[Hugo Awards](#)

[Fireworks](#)

[Panel: Is SF History's Dustbin?](#)

[Panel: The Unnatural History of the Vampire](#)

[Panel: Lysenko Lives \(Scientific Myths that Serve the Cause\)](#)

[Film: The Whip Hand](#)

[Play: Disappearing Acts: Best Short Plays of Alfred Bester](#)

[Miscellaneous](#)

Conspiracy, the 1987 World Science Fiction Convention was held August 27 through August 31 in Brighton, England. The attendance was approximately 5000.

Hotels

The convention was very spread-out. The main track was in the Brighton Centre, the secondary tracks, the Dealers' Room, and the Art Show in the Metropole Complex, and the film program in the Bedford (our hotel). The film room was nicely refrigerated so all the fans from Antarctica felt right at home. The rest of us risked pneumonia.

Hucksters' Room

Actually, there it's called the Dealers' Room--more refined, you know--and was almost entirely books. The media materials were heavily *Dr. Who* and *Star Trek*, with very little movie material per se. Interestingly, one British fan commented that there seemed to be a lot of stuff that didn't belong in a dealers' room at a science fiction convention--why, there was a whole table of Celtic and medieval jewelry! He would be appalled at what passes for a dealers' room at most American science fiction conventions.

In addition to their numbers, the books were reasonably priced. There were, of course, the usual collectors' items, but there were also thousands of books for a pound (about \$1.67) or less. We didn't buy as much as we have at past conventions, but we did pick up two issues of *Little Shoppe of Horrors* and an old British edition of Dennis Wheatley's *Devil Rides Out* (for 15 pence!), as well as about a half dozen other books.

The size of the Dealers' Room (or rooms, actually, since it was really three connected halls) was surprisingly large--23,000 square feet. Of course, with over 5000 attending members, Conspiracy was the size of a North American Worldcon, rather than the smaller, "regional" size associated with "overseas" worldcons.

A note on "foreign," "overseas," and other such designations: there were several program items dealing with these concepts. I suspect that the era of the United States stranglehold on worldcons is over, particularly as the ones held in the United States seem to be getting too big for all but a small handful of cities.

Programming

It's impossible to see everything at a worldcon, so I will just cover the programming I attended. It's by no means complete, but it should give you some idea of what went on.

Panel: British Made (or What Is British SF?)

Thursday, 3pm

Norman Spinrad, John Clute, Toby Roxbaugh

Spinrad started by giving a brief history of transatlantic science fiction--indicating a certain bias in that he seemed to want to define British science fiction in terms of American science fiction. Roxbaugh contrasted the two by saying British science fiction was "cozy," dealing with more limited ideas and settings, while American science fiction went for wider scope and more ranging ideas. He attributed this to the fact that, despite earlier authors, British science fiction got its real start during the 1950s when the British spirit was in a decline. Now there is a revival of spirits in Britain and science fiction is benefiting. Clute continued this thought by describing 1920s and 1930s American science fiction as "flapper science fiction" about outward movement toward a frontier. Even now, American science fiction treats disasters as events, rather than as states of being the way British science fiction does. In American science fiction we *conquer* the aliens; in British science fiction, we *are* the aliens.

There was some discussion of writers not getting published in the other country, more a problem of British authors than of American ones. Ian Watson was cited, though he did have a period of popularity in the United States. After trying to analyze why, the panelists concluded that what people think of as science fiction is really American science fiction and that British science fiction doesn't seem like science fiction at all. British authors who want to sell in the United States have to adopt American language and culture. Furthermore, novels like the Horseclans series or featuring sinewed heroes with submachine guns are less popular in Britain because World War II and the Blitz have made blood more real to the British and less something to be used gratuitously.

With so much discussion on contrasting British and American science fiction, not much was accomplished in defining British science fiction. We heard a lot about what it wasn't but not much about what it was. And this may be the dilemma of British science fiction--it isn't so much an entity in itself but what's "left over" after American science fiction is delineated.

Talk: Great Figures of Science Fiction: H. G. Wells

Thursday, 6pm

Brian Stableford

This session was actually a paper being read rather than a speech. Stableford began by quoting Wells

from a speech "The Discovery of the Future," which Wells gave in 1902. Wells said there were two types of minds: one (the majority) that does not think about the future, and one that thinks mostly about the future. The former is retrospective, legal, submissive, and passive; the latter is constructive, legislative, creative, and active. Wells and others felt that if the past could be inferred (through geology, paleontology, and so forth), one should be able to infer the future as well. His fiction began to emphasize the contrast between the man of the past and the "new men" of the future. I think this shows up most vividly in the film *Things to Come* (the William Cameron Menzies version, not the 1979 travesty entitled *H. G. Wells' The Shape of Things to Come*), where Wells in his screenplay constantly showed the two types in conflict. He denigrated his earlier works, though they remain even to this day more popular than his later ones.

Ironically, in 1905 Anatole France wrote in *The White Stone* that almost all visions of the future were merely the present projected forward (the reverse of what Mark has called the "Happy Days Syndrome" where fiction set in the past has the characters mouthing the philosophies of the present). France claimed that Wells was the one exception right about when Wells stopped drawing his visions of the future. Basically, Wells stopped writing about man being changed and switched to writing about man being replaced.

Stableford explained this by observing that faith in religion and an afterlife is in inverse proportion to faith in the future. As science destroyed the Biblical view of history and hence undermined the hope of an afterlife, political reform and other futurist movements rushed to fill the gap; Stableford observed that many futurist authors were in fact sons of clergymen. But this optimism for the future was overcome by anxiety; the "Age of Frustration" following World War I and resulting from the cynicism engendered by that war exemplify this. World War II increased this, resulting in such works as *1984*. What little hope was left after "the war to end war" was destroyed by World War II, leaving nothing.

On the other hand, American writers who hadn't the intense World War I background that European writers had did not turn to pessimism and cynicism, but continued the extravagant optimism of pre-war Europe. Hence the dichotomy of science fiction versus scientific romance. The United States retained the playfulness without the seriousness; Britain retained the seriousness without the playfulness. Not until the 1980s did the two rejoin.

The question-and-answer period brought out that although other authors wrote about time travel and alien invasion before Wells, he was the catalyst who gave them respectability. For those who care, the August 1958 issue of *Saturn* magazine carried some chapters of *The Time Machine* that Wells had cut.

Film: 99-and-44/100% Dead

Friday, 10:30am

The start of this was delayed 25 minutes while the projectionist shifted the projectors around to compensate for the Cinemascope print. The film is reminiscent of *Trouble in Mind* and *Streets of Fire*, being set in a sort of "future past" where everything seems to be imported from the 1950s, yet is definitely not the 1950s. In *99-and-44/100% Dead* Seattle (apparently) is controlled by two mobs who are having a war, and Harry Crown (played by Richard Harris) is called in by one boss to wipe out the other. It's an odd tongue-in-cheek (at least I think it's tongue-in-cheek) gangster film. I liked it (+1 on the -4 to +4 scale), but Mark and Dave were less positive; in fact, they were downright negative. (This film is also known as *Call Harry Crown*.)

Talk: The Case for Optimism (or Why We Just Might Be Living in a Renaissance)

Friday, 12 noon

>>>ER David Brin

Since the movie started late, it ended late, so I didn't get to this until halfway through. Then I saw that

Anne McCaffrey was autographing from noon to 1 PM in the Dealers' Room and I dashed down to get her autograph in *Cooking Out of This World*, a collection of recipes by science fiction authors that she edited 14 years ago. I recently started collecting autographs of all the contributors (or all that I can find). Anyway, I did get back to Brin's talk to catch the end where he said that Europeans should be thankful that Americans were loud, pushy, and obnoxious, because that was the sort of attitude that brought progress. He spoke of the thin veneer of love of otherness versus self that is present in the United States today and how that needs to be nurtured. He also cited what seemed to be a running theme at this convention, namely that the European experience of two world wars as personal rather than distant has resulted in American science fiction being the carrier of the flame. If people are still afraid of starvation, he claimed, they cannot go bravely into the future, but must always proceed with caution.

He also said that after using the British phone system, he would never say a bad word about Pacific Telephone or AT&T again.

Panel: Great Figures of Science Fiction: Olaf Stapledon

Friday, 1pm

Greg Bear, Brian Aldiss

This was a discussion rather than a lecture. Aldiss began by pointing out that

Saturday was Mary Shelley's birthday, but the Con Committee didn't see fit to schedule a panel on her. (Actually, her birthday was Sunday--I remember that because it's the same as my brother's.) Bear described *Starmaker* as being like a piece of the Holy Grail and said that the debt he owes Stapledon is "immeasurable." Aldiss, in an article tracing the connection between Thomas Hardy's *Dynasts* and Stapledon, said that Stapledon's seeming contradictions (such as having a narrator describe the stars as intelligent and then suddenly say "but of course they're *not* intelligent") were in fact what gave strength to his work. The oft-times depressing concepts of Stapledon are made exhilarating by his prose; his search for God resulted in his creation of godlike creatures.

For all this idolization, Bear and Aldiss recognized Stapledon's flaws--his belief that the United States was full of gangsters, cowboys, and Indians, for example. And as Aldiss said, Stapledon was "bad at history, good at myth"--his works are best when not attempting near-future extrapolations.

In terms of auxiliary works, they recommended J. D. Bernal's *World, the Flesh, and the Devil* and Winwood Reade's *Martyrdom of Man* as having influenced Stapledon. Leslie Fiedler's work on Stapledon was considered extremely inaccurate, especially in its wild speculation about Stapledon's sexuality. Ben Cross and the University of Massachusetts Press are publishing Stapledon's letters to his wife. In fact, more of and about Stapledon has been published in the United States than in Britain, especially such lesser works as *The Flames* and *Darkness and the Light*.

Aldiss related how he first discovered Stapledon. Posted to Assam in World War II, he was sent to a planter's cottage that had been commandeered as the medical officer's hut. While waiting for his shots, he noticed a wall of books. Going over to it, he saw the title *Last and First Men*, started to read the book, and knew he had to finish it. So he rationalized that the owner was probably dead or never going to return and stuffed the book inside his jacket.

When asked about what authors were inspired by Stapledon, Aldiss responded that while many authors crib ideas from Stapledon, few have actually been influenced by him. Bear felt that he had been influenced, particularly in writing about evolution. One wonders if Vonnegut's *Galapagos* was not also inspired by Stapledon. Aldiss observed that science fiction could be predictive, but it could also be digestive, helping to put scientific ideas in terms people could understand, and evolution was the example he gave. And although Stapledon's agnosticism led him to create godlike beings, it also led to his animistic portrayal of the universe.

Stapledon is quite probably my favorite science fiction author, but I seem to be alone in preferring

Last and First Men over all his other books. Aldiss and Bear seemed to feel that *Starmaker* was his best, with *Sirius* close behind.

Film: *War of the Satellites*

Friday, 2:30pm

After a quick run to the Dealers' Room to pick up Bernal's book (which I found in under 10 minutes amongst several hundred thousand books--I swear I have a sixth sense for this!), I went back to the Bedford for *War of the Satellites*. *War of the Satellites* was released in early 1958 in response to Sputnik. Since Sputnik was launched October 4, 1957, this was a real quickie. (Another date I find easy to remember, since it is my parents' anniversary.) Dick Miller stars (yes, stars) as a rocket pilot on Project Sigma. It seems that the Earth has been surrounded by the Sigma Barrier by beings from the Spiral Nebula Ganna to prevent us from escaping Earth and achieving space travel. There are several inspired speeches about how humanity will not knuckle under to alien rulers and how our destiny is to travel in space. Shot in response to Soviet achievements, the film seems now to represent the Soviet attitude toward space more than our own. Though some of the science is laughable, this is worth seeing.

Presentation: "Superman": The 50-Year Slide Show

Friday, 4pm

Julius Schwartz

Again, I arrived late. Chelsea Quinn Yarbro was signing at 4, supposedly at the Conspiracy table in the Dealers' Room, but after queueing there for about 15 minutes, we discovered she was at the Women's Press table instead. So we went there; luckily the queue was short.

I got to "Superman" about 4:30pm. Schwartz did have some interesting details to recount (Alfred Bester was the first choice for scripting *Superman I*, there had been plans to build "Supermanland" in Metropolis, Illinois, Schwartz managed to tone down Superman from the extremes that had crept in over the years, etc.), but since I was never a great comics fan, much of it was not very meaningful to me.

Film: *The Element of Crime*

Friday, 6:30pm

After a quick Greek dinner with Mark, Kate, and Saul, I returned to the refrigerator to watch this Danish film with Mark, Dave, and Kate. The film hadn't started, so I went up to the room to get our jumpers (sweaters). When I returned Mark said I had missed about an hour. In the next five minutes I saw what he meant--it seemed like another hour. Described in the Pocket Programme as a "slow but fascinating futuristic thriller about the torpor that has infected the entire world" (or at least the production crew), this film was unwatchable. It was shot in English (which helped) in the dark (which didn't). I wonder how many people actually *like* this film. We all (except for Kate) gave up after 15 minutes.

@ Party

Friday, 8pm

At about 8, Mark and I went to the @ party for people on Usenet, Arpanet, and other electronic networks. I will not attempt an attendance list unless Nicholas Simicich (who so graciously volunteered his room for the second year in a row) posts it before this is done. There were about three dozen people there, including fans from Finland, Britain, and the United States. One hot topic was Boskone 25, including possible questions for a "Boskone SAT": what is Heinlein's middle name?, name one series by Doc Smith, who wrote the "Tarot" series? Unfortunately, I had to leave right about the time that Saul and Nicholas started discussing whether NESFA was being arrogant or not.

I once again heard that I'm not as people pictured me, that no one understands how Mark and I can write so much (wait till they see his log and this report!), etc. I also heard that the Sheraton was close to signing a final contract with MCFI arranging for 1000-2000 hotel rooms/beds but no function space and no parties allowed. This certainly sounds like it will solve the hotel's concerns about a 24-hour-a-day convention, since all that is now in the Hynes, and will solve the convention's problems of where to put 6000+ fans.

The first @ party I went to was two years ago and I didn't recognize anyone. Now I know a lot of the people there and they know me, even though we've never met. Isn't technology wonderful?!

Art Show

First thing Saturday morning we walked through the Art Show. The quality was much higher than at United States worldcons, perhaps because the lesser amateur artists didn't want to travel or carry art to England. The result was a marked decrease in bad unicorns and cute dragons, making the Art Show more enjoyable. There were a couple of special exhibits: the Dragon's World/Paper Tiger exhibit and the Fearful Symmetries exhibit. The latter was one of modern, for the most part surrealist art and was, I think, of museum caliber.

From 11am to 11:45am I waited with some other fans for E. C. Tubb to appear for his signing session. Apparently the Con Committee failed to inform him as to when it was, and he didn't arrive until later in the afternoon. I did manage to get his autograph as he was walking through the Brighton Centre later and I got a chance to talk to some other fans who were waiting there, as well as people like George "Lan" Laskowski who wandered by.

Panel: The Horror, the Horror, the Horror

Saturday, 12 noon

Ramsey Campbell, Clive Barker

James Herbert was also supposed to be on this panel (the third "the Horror"), but couldn't make it. Campbell and Barker claimed this was because of Herbert's recent vasectomy, but we couldn't tell if they were serious. Clive Barker smokes cigars. Blech!

Barker talked about his research trip to a hospital morgue where (he claimed) they had recently sacked the assistant, a hunchback, because patients seeing him carrying large trash sacks through the courtyard tended to freak out.

The theory was then proposed that the mystery surrounding death was what made horror popular. Barker asked how many people in the audience had work that brought them into contact with the dead. There were three: a nurse, a medical student, and Kate. When Barker asked Kate what she did, she said she worked in a nursing home and provided "post-mortem care." Barker found this an odd phrase and started asking her questions (in front of the whole audience of several hundred people) about exactly what she did, what happened to the teeth, etc. Kate of course *loved* being in conversation with her favorite author.

Barker claimed he "went away with stuff [he] could use" from his excursion, which drew a lot of laughs. He also complained about the "tyranny of the real," and complained that the censor who insisted he remove the crucified rat from one of his movies had "no sense of art." He also talked about the quirks in the MPAA code, such as in a sex scene two consecutive buttock thrusts are okay, but three would be deemed obscene.

The panel was more anecdotal than a coherent study of some aspect of horror. It was entertaining, and somewhat of a change from the serious tone of the previous panels I had attended.

Kate went to a later panel where Barker and William Gibson talked about sudden success. Apparently

after Gibson sold *Neuromancer*, he got a small royalties check and figured that was that. Then he went on a trip and got a phone call from his wife saying he had just gotten another check for \$100,000!

Panel: Bones Cracked, Blood Spurred As He Edited Out the Violence

Saturday, 3pm

Iain Banks, Mike Resnick, Kim Newman, Ramsay Campbell, Orson Scott Card, James Morrow

We went to the Brighton Centre for a snack before the 2pm slide presentation on *The New Atlantis* and *Slipstream*, but when we got to the presentation it had been canceled. We stood around talking to people, including Chuq Von Rospach of *OtherRealms* and Laurie Sefton. At 3pm I popped upstairs for Aldiss's signing session, then back downstairs for this panel, which seemed to have acquired several people in addition to the originally scheduled participants. Card was saying that the sort of thing his children watch on cartoon shows, where the good guys win without ever hurting anyone or being hurt themselves, strikes him as far more dangerous and harmful than portraying violence in a realistic manner. This realism means focusing on individuals, since an individual's pain and suffering are more meaningful to the reader than that of a faceless crowd of thousands or millions. Of course, Card used this in *Ender's Game*, where the reader is supposed to empathize more with Ender's predicament than with the genocide of the Bugger race.

The question of censorship (and self-censorship) was raised, with Banks and Newman admitting to some self-censorship. Card said that there were some things he couldn't write, but this was because of his feelings rather than an effort to censor his writing to make it more acceptable.

The uses of violence were, of course, a major issue. Violence or the threat of violence as a means to get and keep power was the first use, but violence as connected with sacrifice was also high on the authors' lists. Someone (Card?) pointed out that the central myth of Christianity relies not only on the death of a messiah, but on his suffering.

The other major uses of violence listed were violence for its own sake (the Shaun Hutson school of writing) and violence as revenge (usually demonstrated by an author killing another author in his books, though Card claims keeping them alive and just making them stupid is better).

Panel: When Were the Golden Years of SF Movies?

Saturday, 4pm

Peter Nicholls, Kim Newman, Bill Warren, John Brosnan

The first claim was that the Golden Age has not yet arrived. Warren presented a chart showing science fiction movies as a percentage of all movies released each year. Not surprisingly, the rate is steadily going up. In terms of box-office, the high point was 1985, with 58% of gross receipts attributable to science fiction.

In terms of a turning point, 1968 with *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Barbarella*, *Night of the Living Dead*, and *Planet of the Apes* was cited. Mark would have liked them to include *Five Million Years to Earth* (a.k.a. *Quatermass and the Pit*), but I would claim that is perhaps the last of the old-style science fiction. 1977 with *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* was another turning point.

The panel asked (rhetorically) what happened to all the young Turks: Lucas, Spielberg, Dante, Landis, Cohen, Carpenter. This led to a long discussion of the two versions of *The Thing* versus the original story.

Non-English-language films (particularly Eastern European films) were briefly mentioned, but the panel focused almost entirely on United States, British, Canadian, and Australian films. The effect of cable, video, etc., was discussed, particularly the proliferation of different versions of a single film: the United States theatrical version, the British version (less violence), the Japanese version (more

violence), the cable version, the cassette version, the "special" TV version (with added footage to fill two 2-hour slots), the regular TV version (cut to fit one 2-hour slot or less),.... Apparently there are now full versions of *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (the Fredric March version), and *Bride of Frankenstein*.

One interesting note was that Jack Arnold never thought much of his science fiction films, nor did the studio, until John Baxter in his *Science Fiction in the Cinema* devoted an entire chapter to Arnold ("The Dark Genius of the Science Fiction Cinema").

Panel: Tomorrow Belongs to the Illiterate

Saturday, 5pm

Kim Stanley Robinson, William Gibson, James Patrick Kelly

The subtitle to this panel was "wired-up cyberspace or after the holocaust?" but the topic was so vague as to make the panel almost incoherent. As if to deny a decline in literacy, Gibson spent the entire time writing. Unfortunately, what he was writing was his name on dozens of autograph sheets for insertion in an anthology, and this meant he wasn't paying a lot of attention to, or participating in, the panel at hand. Robinson and Kelly tried to take up the slack, but they presented mostly disconnected facts and observations. For example, the United Nations figures show that the younger a population, the more literate it is, and claim a literacy rate of 99.5% in the United States. All the first indicates is that no government wants to admit that they are doing a *worse* job of spreading literacy than their predecessors. I think the second is overly optimistic, even though in absolute figures it means about a million Americans are illiterate.

Whether computers would lead to a post-literate society was brought up and the panelists countered by observing that the big push in computers today was toward desk-top publishing--more books rather than fewer. Someone brought up the ideas of "historical literacy" or "scientific literacy," but Robinson felt that was changing the definition of the word "literacy" from what the panel was there to discuss. This seemed like a petty distinction since the panel hadn't been so focused or directed up to this point that a slight change in topic would have hurt.

The issue of "easy" versus "difficult" authors arose. While authors who write in "workmanlike Campbellian prose" are usually considered easy to read, the concepts they describe ("The door dilated." "Trantor was a planet covered by city.") are not within people's everyday experiences and are often difficult for the new science fiction reader to understand. Who is the audience science fiction writers are aiming for? Is it 14-year-old boys? Or is the graying of the science fiction readership mentioned in another panel the case? Are the young becoming "functional-only" literate? Interesting questions, to which the panel provided no answers and (unfortunately) not much insight.

Masquerade

The Masquerade was scheduled from 6pm to 10pm, We had planned to see a film and eat at 8pm, but decided to eat at 6pm and then catch the second half of the Masquerade. However, the Masquerade ran until only about 7:30pm, meaning that by the time we finished eating we had missed it. I guess most non-British fans didn't bother to try to bring costumes and British costuming fandom is much more limited than costuming fandom in the United States. One woman told us that in her town she had to send away for silver sequins, for example, because they just weren't available anywhere near her. Only in the United States do you have 6-hour masquerades.

Film: *Death Line*

Saturday, 11pm

At 11pm, we went to the Odeon to see *Death Line* (a.k.a. *Raw Meat*). Conspiracy had arranged to use a first-run cinema for its 35mm film program in the morning and late at night. The theatre (actually one screen of a multi-screen cinema) is stepped so that you can easily see the screen over the heads of

the people in front of you. Unfortunately, the condition of this film was not up to theatrical standards, with scratchiness and bits missing throughout. (I heard that other films were in much better condition.)

The film itself was unusual in that the interesting part was the non-fantasy part. As soon as they switched scenes to the main premise it got very dull. The premise is that in the 1890s there was a cave-in at a new station and line being constructed at Russell Square and several Irish labourers (men and women) were supposedly killed. The construction company went bankrupt and couldn't afford to dig out the bodies. As you probably guessed, the labourers didn't die but survived and reproduced, and their descendents are replenishing their food supply from the platform at Russell Square--and not from the candy machines either.

That was the dull part. The good part was Donald Pleasence as a quirky, crabby police inspector. Christopher Lee had a minuscule part (less than five minutes on screen) and was undoubtedly there to provide a big "name" in the credits.

Panel: Rockets and Rayguns (What Has the Space Race Achieved?)

Sunday, 11am

Robert Forward, Charles Sheffield, David Brin

The first half of this was devoted to setting up a satellite link to Sri Lanka to present Arthur C. Clarke with the SFWA Grand Master Award. The connection was not very good and apparently it was the local connections rather than the satellite causing most of the problems. The transmission delay (the time for the signal to go from Britain to the satellite and then to Sri Lanka) was irritating and Clarke observed we may be the last generation to talk to each other without such a delay as a normal thing. Clarke said that the only time he thinks about how he is able to sit in Sri Lanka and talk to someone in London is when it doesn't work. He expressed regret that he couldn't make the convention but said he would if it were held in Sri Lanka, at which point someone called out "Sri Lanka in 2001!" which is sure to be a button soon.

The panel mentioned that Brin was a Californian living in London, Sheffield from Washington DC but now living in Yorkshire, Forward a Canadian living in Scotland, and Clarke an Englishman living in Sri Lanka, indicating the international nature and planet-wide perspective that science fiction has. In fact, Brin claims that the most important event of the space age was the pictures of the entire Earth sent back by Apollo 8, which took the word "planet" from the science fiction community and gave it to the world.

Forward, who had another talk on anti-matter, claimed that in 20-30 years we would have anti-matter propulsion at a cost of \$10M per milligram of fuel. If that sounded high, he said, consider that a grain of salt is about 10 milligrams (roughly) and, if it were anti-matter, could take us to Mars in 3 or 4 months.

Brin had said that we were engaged in the "other space race," that of beating the decline in resources occurring on Earth. This, by the way, is a concept Stapledon enlarged upon in *Last and First Men*. Sheffield responded to this by calling it "temporal chauvinism"--that every generation has seen itself as the peak, the culmination of humanity's striving. All three conceded, however, that there was some truth in Parkinson's Third Law: Delay is the deadliest form of denial.

Regarding the United States program, Sheffield said "the gargoyles are now running the cathedral," and that the reson robotic probes are popular with the bureaucracy is that piloted missions imply both greater risk and greater publicity. The latter would be okay, but not the former. NASA is caught in the bind of wanting to capture the public's imagination and attention without taking risks. And, as they say, "No guts, no glory."

Once again, the old standby of the United States and the U.S.S.R. as the hare and the tortoise was

trotted out. Equally predictably, it was said that the West lacks not only continuous commitment to space, but the ability even to have such a commitment. One of the panelists (I forget which one) said that there is a saying: "You don't Pearl Harbor America." The Soviets Pearl-Harbored us in 1957 and again in 1961, but they've learned their lesson and now everything they do is "just an incremental step." The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, they say....

At the end, the discussion degenerated into a pro and con SDI argument and I left early. In reference to the title, though, Sheffield summed up the way to look at it. "The space race," he said, "is the human race."

TV Show: *Colonel March Investigates*
Sunday, 12 noon

Colonel March Investigates was a British television series starring Boris Karloff as Colonel March of Scotland Yard. This episode was entitled "The Missing Link" and concerned the theft of the skull of "Damascus man," or the missing link, from a museum in London. (For the reader untrained in archaeology I will point out that no such skull actually exists.) The show's only connection to science fiction was that Karloff starred in it, and it was a pretty typical show of the time--nothing special.

TV Show: *The Adventures of Dr. Fu Manchu*
Sunday, 1:30pm

They were supposed to show *Adam Adamant Lives* before this but they had some problems and eventually showed some other television show instead. That ran late, so I saw some of it. It used masks and appliances not unlike some of the effects in the "Star Wars" movies, particularly in *Return of the Jedi*. I suppose it's very similar to the way the Muppets are done. I'm surprised it hasn't been picked up by American television. I wonder what it was.

The Adventures of Dr. Fu Manchu (maybe they felt calling him "Dr." would help counteract some of the racism?) was another old television show, but American. How Fu Manchu and Nayland Smith ended up in Los Angeles is not clear. This episode, "The Counterfeiters of Dr. Fu Manchu," has Fu Manchu trying to extort some atomic power plant plans from the United States government by threatening to flood the country with perfectly counterfeited money. A kidnapped chemist manages to send his wife word as to where he is being held (even though he was blindfolded when he was taken there) through a code that he used during the war to let her know where he was. Somehow this breaking of wartime secrecy and security doesn't seem to bother anyone.

Guest of Honor Film Show & Interview: Ray Harryhausen
Sunday, 3pm

This program item consisted of 50 minutes of film clips from Harryhausen's movies, followed by an interview of Harryhausen conducted by John Brosnan and a question-and-answer period. In response to one of Brosnan's questions, Harryhausen said the most difficult sequence to film was the skeleton sequence for *Jason and the Argonauts*. One trend he discussed was the growing cost of making films--*Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* cost \$200,000, while *Clash of the Titans* cost \$11,000,000. And while it was true the octopus in *It Came from Beneath the Sea* had fewer than eight legs for budgetary reasons, it had six rather than the five that most people have heard about. Harryhausen also said that they never were able to get permission to film on the Golden Gate Bridge because the officials didn't want to alarm the public with the thought that a giant octopus could destroy the bridge.

Harryhausen described how shots containing both modelwork and human actors were done. The human actor was timed and choreographed to precisely match the modelwork. For the lassoing in *Valley in Gwangi*, a jeep with a pole was used. The actor lassoed the pole and the jeep simulated the pulling of the dinosaur. Later the jeep and pole were matted out and the dinosaur added.

Harryhausen also talked about the problems of multiple film crews at popular locations. While filming one of the Sinbad movies, for example, a Spanish galleon from the filming of *The Armada* drifted across the area they were filming.

Harryhausen disliked both the new King Kong films ("They're ruining the good name of Kong.") and colorization. For the original *King Kong*, he says O'Brien used Dore's engravings as a guide toward how to get depth, with differing levels of light for foreground, midground, and background. All this would be lost with colorization.

Mark asked how he determined how Pegasus would land. Harryhausen said that with the wings over the shoulders the lift was all in front, so the hind legs had to land first, but that he did test several different landings to see what looked most realistic. He mentioned an Italian Hercules film with winged horses having only three-foot wings as the sort of ludicrousness that he tried to avoid.

Though after *Clash of the Titans* there were some plans to film *Force of the Trojans* about Aeneas and the founding of Rome, Harryhausen seems to have decided to retire from movies and now works on bronze sculptures of figures from his films.

Hugo Awards Sunday, 8pm

We ate dinner and then went to queue up for the Hugo Awards ceremony. First we got told to queue at one spot, then we got moved to another. We couldn't sit in the main arena, which was reserved for nominees, pros, etc., but had to sit in the balcony. This in spite of the fact that the seats in the main arena were half-empty. In addition, the first seats that we took, on the side, had their view of the screen blocked by large speakers. So we moved to center seats to get a better view. We had hoped that they would show clips from the dramatic presentations, but they just showed slides of the posters.

Well, on to the awards: Best Novel: *Speaker for the Dead*, Orson Scott Card Best Novella: "Gilgamesh in the Outback," Robert Silverberg Best Novelette: "Permafrost," Roger Zelazny Best Short Story: "Tangents," Greg Bear Best Non-Fiction: *Trillion Year Spree*, Brian Aldiss with David Wingrove Best Semi-Prozine: *Locus* Best Editor: Terry Carr Best Dramatic Presentation: *Aliens* Best Pro Artist: Jim Burns Best Fanzine: *Ansible* Best Fan Writer: Dave Langford Best Fan Artist: Brad Foster; John W. Campbell Award: Karen Joy Fowler Seiun ("Japanese Hugo") for Best Novel in Translation: *Neuromancer*, William Gibson Seiun for Best Short Story in Translation: "Press Enter," John Varley First Fandom Award: Bea Mahaffey Big Heart Award: Wiktor Bukato from Poland and Tetsu Yano and Takumi Shibano from Japan shared this award. I couldn't understand their names and the newsletter listing the awards didn't think that these last four awards were worth listing, but luckily Mike Glyer listed them in *File 770*. .fi

They also re-awarded Arthur C. Clarke his SFWA Grand Master Award, without satellite link this time. Both times it was accepted by his brother Fred, who looks just like him.

Fireworks Sunday, 10pm

The awards were over by 9:30pm, giving us plenty of time for the fireworks display on the beach. The British have more noise-makers in their displays, while almost all of the American displays is visual. Also, because we were so close, they could do a lot more low-level and ground-level stuff. There was one effect like a giant white veil or curtain which I had never seen before.

It would have been perfect except that standing in the breeze after sweating in the Hugo Awards put the final touches on my cold which decided to hit in full force. So afterward, I went back to the room and talked with Chuck, Dave, Kate, and Cynthia. Eventually Dave and Mark went to see *Static* and everyone else left so I caught up on my log and went to sleep.

Panel: Is SF History's Dustbin?

Monday, 11am

Mike Dickinson, Robert Silverberg, John M. Ford, Gene Wolfe

This was supposedly about alternate pasts, but dwelt more on how history was used to project onto the future or to fill in details of future histories. Silverberg spoke of "that alien land, the past," and how one had to try to understand it. In *Book of the New Sun*, so he claimed, Wolfe "transmutes the past into the future." The panelists agreed that authors need a respect for history.

Silverberg said that his novel *Gilgamesh the King* was an attempt to rationalize myths. Wolfe felt that the supernatural elements of Arthurian legends could be explained: the sword in the stone, for example, is a sword made of meteoric iron, and the sword from the lake is a sword made from bog iron. Many myths or customs are explained as religious in nature--amber beads in Roman burials, for example. But amber beads were probably just rubbed against wool and used as electrostatic lint removers. We try to reconstruct the mosaic from individual tiles; history is not holographic.

The old discussion of historical trends versus the individual's effects was raised. Though many believe the former is the prime motivating force, authors agree the latter is the better for writing stories. Ford suggested writing a story from the point of view of the Black Plague; someone claimed Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* had already done this.

The panel closed with a recounting of some useless myths--myths that exists but seem to have no reason for being. One example was Geoffrey of Monmouth's description of a giant eagle landing on the walls of the city and speaking in a human voice, but "what he said was not interesting enough to relate here." These seemed like interesting launching points for stories and maybe we'll see one or two soon.

Panel: The Unnatural History of the Vampire

Monday, 12 noon

Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, Tanith Lee, George R. R. Martin, Suzy McKee Charnas

This panel consisted of a series of questions that each panelist had to answer, followed by a general question-and-answer session.

The first question asked what aspect of the vampire mythos the authors found most difficult to convince their audience of, but they instead responded as to what they found most confining; the answers included non-reflection in mirrors, running water, garlic, and fangs.

Yarbro claimed the only myths that have retained their popularity are the vampire myth and the werewolf myth. One suggestion was that vampires and werewolves are things we could become and dragons and trolls are not. Of course, vampirism is supposed to represent suppressed sexuality and lycanthropy is the myth of the beast within us. Someone claimed the real reason that vampires and werewolves are still popular is that they're cheap to do as movie monsters as compared to other monsters.

A lot of the mythos of vampirism--the mirror, for example--is based on people's inability to determine accurately whether someone is really dead or not. One audience member suggested the current trends in genetic engineering might result in a renaissance of the Frankenstein myth. Another person said the new mythos might be that of the super-hero. Ghosts are still around, but have little inherent conflict to make ghost stories interesting. Robots may also be the new monsters, with the Three Laws of Robotics serving as the garlic and crosses to use against them.

The question of AIDS and vampirism was raised. Charnas said that her vampires could smell if someone was sick and didn't drink their blood, but this seems like a good area for some author to explore. Charnas's solution, by the way, was put in before the AIDS epidemic--she was more

concerned about diseases like hepatitis when she wrote *The Vampire Tapestry*.

Panel: Lysenko Lives (Scientific Myths that Serve the Cause)

Monday, 3pm

Mike Dickinson, Joe Haldman, David Brin, Brian Stableford

Because of some difficulty in finding lunch, we didn't get to this until 3:30pm, by which point several major theses had obviously been presented and discussed. Once again, I heard people talking about "memes," a concept that has been explained to me twice and I still can't remember what it is. The few odds and ends I did glean included Brin's theory that if the religious right had reached the stage of trying to discredit secular humanism by calling it a religion and pushing creationism as "creation science" or "scientific creationism," then this is the dying whimper of a group who claims to follow the meme of religion rather than the meme of science.

Brin also observed what I have claimed, namely that if the far right is wrong in claiming AIDS is the scourge of God and we shouldn't spend money to stop it, then the left is equally wrong in opposing all standard epidemic control procedures by claiming that they might lead to persecution of "certain groups." I'm not sure what precisely Brin advocates, but I have never understood why testing people for all (other) venereal diseases is acceptable and this one disease, more dangerous than any other, is protected. Nor do I understand how gay groups can say on the one hand that AIDS is not a "gay disease" and on the other hand insist on gay representation on AIDS commissions and explicit protection for gays in all AIDS legislation. I am not being anti-gay--I am a member of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force--but I feel that the stands taken by many groups are inconsistent. We should be fighting the discrimination and persecution as separate issues, and look at how to solve the AIDS problem rationally. But I digress.

There were also some comments on socio-biology, which Brin supports, and the preponderance of Jews in science, science fiction, and philosophy, which was said to be due to the emphasis on education in many (most?) families.

Film: *The Whip Hand*

Monday, 4:30pm

After the talk, I wandered around talking to people--people from Usenet, friends, and so forth. I offered my condolences to Lan on losing the Hugo, but he said his only regret was that the first time he lost the Hugo, there was no Hugo losers party. Maia seemed to have held up pretty well through the convention, cast, crutch, and all. We agreed we had to get together for longer than five minutes at a time at Nolacon. The good part of going to conventions is that you get to see old friends; the bad part is that you see them for about 47 seconds each.

The Whip Hand is an odd little film from the 1950s about a town in Minnesota taken over by Communists who have a Nazi scientist doing germ warfare there. I can see why it isn't shown very much--it is indicative of the paranoia of the time and somewhat embarrassing from the current perspective. That the totally unsubstantiated word of a reporter would bring in the police et al, guns blazing, to destroy the evil Communists is as frightening today as a film like *Gabriel over the White House*, which has a (supposedly) divinely inspired President disband Congress and rule as a benevolent dictator. This, like the gut reaction of *The Whip Hand*, is presented as a good thing. Most members of the audience probably would disagree.

Play: *Disappearing Acts: Best Short Plays of Alfred Bester*

Monday, 8pm

We went to dinner at a fish-and-chips place, then everyone else (Mark, Dave, Kate, Cynthia, and Chuck) went to walk on the pier. It was getting chilly, though, and I decided that I should go back to the hotel and get a jumper rather than aggravate my cold by walking on the pier, which turns out to be

pretty much like a New Jersey boardwalk anyway.

At 8pm, I went back to the Metropole and discovered there was a queue for the plays. On getting into the room, we discovered that the seats we could get were all behind tall people, so we ended up moving back to the back row and stacking a couple of chairs to get a higher view.

The four plays were "They Don't Make Life Like They Used To," "The Pi Man," "The Flowered Thunderbug," and "Disappearing Act," all by Alfred Bester. I enjoyed the first one, as I had enjoyed the story when I first read it in a Judith Merrill anthology. The second was a bit New-Wavish for me, though the actor who did it rose to the extraordinary demands put on him in what is essentially a one-man recital of, at times, totally disconnected words. The third rehashed the old idea of misinterpreting past events and objects. (See "Is SF History's Dustbin?" earlier in this report. See also *Motel of the Mysteries*.) Maybe it wasn't old when Bester first did it, but at this point most people would probably find it repetitious. The final play was really a playette that served to tie together the rest of the plays.

On the whole, *Disappearing Acts* was a well-done, amateur production. Though not up to the standards of Leicester Square, it was probably more enjoyable than *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*--at least Kate claimed so. It was a suitably intellectual end to a convention of more intellectual content than most held in the United States (Readercon excepted, and Readercon is much more limited).

Miscellaneous

The Program Book was a hard-cover, only the second such in worldcon history (the first was at MidAmericon in 1976).

The convention was strung out along about a half-mile of beachfront. This meant getting between items on time was difficult, particularly since the panels insisted on filling the full hour or even running over, rather than ending after 50 minutes as the Committee had intended. On the other hand, the weather was ideal--unusually sunny and around 70 degrees Fahrenheit. If it had rained the whole time we would have been miserable.

The hotel situation was even more spread-out. true, some people had asked for hotels further away to save money, but even those who requested one of the main hotels often found themselves a 20-minute walk away. Just as last time, Brighton ended up with far more people than they expected--at least it seemed that way and the hotel situation was a mess. We were lucky--we got our first choice and at only 20.50 pounds per person per night. The Massachusites had a smaller room in a more distant hotel with three in a room and it was 24 pounds per person per night for them.

There was a street of restaurants right by our hotel. They were on the whole good but expensive, 7 to 10 pounds for dinner. One difference between American and English restaurants is that in English restaurants everything is a la carte, including vegetables and potatoes (though there are a few plates that will include one or the other or rice). Even bread costs 50 pence or so. The problem with this is that to those who aren't used to it, dinner can end up costing more than they expect. (In Scotland, on the other hand, dinners usually include potato and vegetable.)

There were far fewer parties than at an American convention and they were much less publicized. Still, the Metropole ended up turning people away when their occupancy exceeded fire regulations. Drinking is more pervasive in Britain, with people wandering all around the convention areas with beers in hand.

I got to meet some of the people I was hoping to see, but not for long enough, and I missed others entirely.

Of the postal service problems, I will say nothing, as they are well-known. Of the complaint that the

Europeans have a stranglehold on the "Western region" conventions, I will comment. My philosophical observation is that of the 48 World Science Fiction Conventions held or scheduled, only 7 have been outside the United States (one in Heidelberg, two in Australia, two in Britain, one in Toronto, and one in Holland--which won the 1990 bid). Since it is obviously easier to get votes for a European location *at* a European location, it stands to reason that this will happen in the future. Therefore, my practical observation is that as long as voting for a particular region is done at a convention held in that region, inertia will keep a European convention in Europe, a United States convention in the United States, etc. Perhaps, as many have suggested, we should form a fourth region comprising Europe. This would ensure that European fans get a reasonable share of conventions and have the advantage of shifting the voting to a different region from the one being voted on. Eventually, I would envision a fifth region comprising Asia and Australia. This still leaves South America and Africa, regions that have not yet shown any great urge to host Worldcons yet.

Next year in New Orleans!

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