Denvention 3 (Worldcon 2008)
A convention report by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Introduction

What is the point of folding everything neatly to pack it when they rummage through it all when they decide you are the person they are going to randomly check? Luckily, most of our clothing is fairly wrinkle-proof, though Mark's pants do tend to show wrinkles if not folded neatly.

Our flight was oversold, so they asked for volunteers to take a connecting flight to Denver--connecting through Houston. Having just finished reading about how people on the Texas Gulf coast are busy boarding up against Hurricane Edouard scheduled to arrive today, this seemed like a really, *really* bad idea. And it is not like they are offering you money--they are offering a $300 travel voucher. These days that covers your excess baggage charges. :-((Actually, Continental is pretty good about that, and also still serves meals, does not charge for sodas or water, and will provide a pillow and blanket without your having to pay for them.)

We were planning to try to find a third person to share a taxi to the Crowne Plaza, but when we got off the plane, we ran into our friend John Sloan, who was there to pick up two friends from Tucson and take them to the Crowne Plaza! Luckily, we had only carry-on luggage and he had enough room in his car, so we had what he dubbed "Suburu-con". Thanks, John!

Registration

We got to the Crowne Plaza, but our room was not ready. (It was 2PM; check-in time was actually

4PM.) So we checked our luggage and walked over to the Convention Center to register for the convention. The materials came in "Tattered Cover" paper shopping bags; the one freebie was a water bottle. I am glad we registered when we did; the lines were much longer the next day.

We spent some time walking around the 16th Street Mall, then ate lunch/dinner at An's Lemongrass Grille and returned to the hotel to check in.

Hotel

The Crowne Plaza is a nice hotel, but has some problems. There is so much "towel origami" in the bathroom (e.g., washcloths folded into fans and wrapped at one end with a face towel) that you cannot figure out which configuration has the bath mat. There is a really nice adjustable shower head, but even stretching I can barely reach it to adjust it. (I am 5'3".) And the sink has a countertop that bulges out so far that you cannot lean over the sink, and spitting out your toothpaste into the sink after brushing tastes a real effort. (Washing one's hair in the sink is completely impossible.) The low-flow toilet is so low-flow that it always required two flushes, which somewhat defeats the purpose.

The television has a DVD player setting, but no input jacks (and we did not bring the RF modulator). The remote also has a sleep button, but the television apparently has no sleep cycle.

The housekeeping was also terrible. Two days we got no clean glasses, one day no coffee pack, and most days only one sugar and creamer. The air conditioning leaked and the carpet in that corner of the room was wet the entire time. Sunday the room was not made up until 5:30 PM.

On the plus side, there were two free Internet computers in the lobby, which had card readers/writers for several types of memory cards.

Green Room

The Green Room was conveniently located, had reasonable food and beverages, and had a clock. It did not officially open until 10 AM, which is not very useful for people with 10 AM panels. However, people started going in about 9:30 AM anyway.

Programming

Program items was 75 minutes long in 90-minute slots, so things were less rushed but there were fewer of them. (It is also harder to keep track of starting times: does the next panel start at 1:00 PM or 1:30 PM?)

The acoustics usually required using the microphones. The water pitchers were set directly on the front table, so after an hour or so the condensation had formed pools of water all over where panelists wanted to put their name cards, notes, etc. (It did inhibit authors from propping up a wall of their books in front of them, so some good came of it.)

I realize that scheduling software is not perfect, but I still think some major errors could have been avoided. The retrospective series of panels was collectively called "Timeless Stars", but two of them, Olaf Stapledon and Cyril Kornbluth were opposite each other. And in one time slot, they had three panels, one each on Asimov, Clarke, and Heinlein, all opposite each other!

Dealers Room

It was a fairly small Dealers Room as Worldcons go, with what seemed like an even split between book and non-book dealers. One dealer was selling digest magazines, so I looked to see if he had an issue of *Fantastic Universe* I was looking for. He did not seem to have it, and when he looked it up, he said, "Oh, that was the last issue and it had a Frederic Brown story and a Robert Bloch story, so

that's why it's hard to find." I say I was actually looking for it for the Jorge Luis Borges story ("The Rejected Sorcerer"), and his response was, "Oh. I'm not familiar with him." Talk about depressing!

[I finally located a book that reprinted the Borges story. When I read it, I thought, "This sounds very familiar." Sure enough, googling for a phase from it led me to the fact that it appeared in *A Universal History of Infamy* under the title "The Wizard Postponed", a title sharing only the definite article and not even retaining the word order!]

Art Show

The Art Show seemed rather smallish for a Worldcon. The artists I most liked were Vincent Villafranca (bronzes), Johanna Y. Klukas (woods), Peri Charlifu (ceramics inspired by "Lord of the Rings"), Jeff Sturgeon (acrylic oils on metal), and Mark Roland (etching).

Giant Monster Movies--Where's Mothra When You Really Need Her?
Wednesday, 11:30AM
Joshua Bilmes, Bob Eggleton, Mark Leeper, Frank Wu (mod)

Description: "Do you remember Saturday afternoons at the local theatre watching a double feature of Mothra and Godzilla? Or did you first watch these classic movies on TV or even on Netflix? Our panel of movie enthusiasts will discuss the monster classics and tell us about their favorites."

Attendance: 60

Wu plugged his movie "Giant Space Chicken", and Eggleton said it reminded him of Poltia in "Jimmy Neutron". The inspiration seems to be from the 1967 *The X from Outer Space*, whose sequel *Gulaba's Counterattack* was just released two weeks before the convention.

[The 1961 *Mysterious Island* also had a giant chicken.]

Leeper began the panel proper by observing that the original *Gojira*, the first real kaiju film, was very grim, and that this year's *Cloverfield* restored that sense of grimness. He suggested that it also made it impossible to make another Godzilla film. Eggleton thought they could make another Godzilla film. but it would require a fresh imagination. In fact, when he was in Japan recently, people at Toho were asking him about *Cloverfield*. Leeper said that the difference with *Cloverfield* is that the "sense of wonder" (in the sense of "ain't it cool") has been taken out of there. Wu said that even the last shot of *Cloverfield*, supposedly a happy shot, shows something falling from the sky.

Bilmes thought it is too easy to do monsters artificially now, and so they do not look realistic. (Willis O'Brien's King Kong may not look realistic in the sense of being a real living animal, but at least he looks like something three-dimensional existing in space and having mass.) Eggleton quoted Ray Harryhausen as saying that the "ooh-aah" is gone--there is no dramatic build-up to the monsters these days. In that regard, at least, *Cloverfield* is a return to that philosophy.

Wu said that "The oNion" said that the most amazing thing about *Jurassic Park* was not that they could make the dinosaurs so real, but that they could make the people so fake.

Eggleton observed that one problem with *Cloverfield* was that an hour of hand-held camera gave viewers motion sickness. It was better on DVD, he said (maybe because the image on most screens would be smaller and show less motion relative to your field of view).

Eggleton said there were now three schools of animation: "suit-mation", stop-motion, and CGI. Toho was old school, and had no budget to speak of. Leeper described most Godzilla movies as "two men in rubber suits killing a third man in a rubber suit." He also observed that there is at least one other type, giving as an example "The Lion King" on stage, which used inventive and symbolic costuming.

Regarding Toho's Godzilla films, Leeper wondered why they did not use more low-angle shots to give the monsters a feeling of immensity. Eggleton says that they have gotten back to doing so. He added that he found out that the actual man in the suit has to go into a meditative state before getting into it because the suit is so restrictive.

Someone asked about *Host*. Leeper said that after the build-up for it, it was disappointing. He felt it was not kaiju because the monster was not big enough, and was really "just a big mutant monster." It was also fairly anti-American, but based on fact. Eggleton said another problem was that you just could not like the human characters.

Someone in the audience asked how filmmakers could bring back the "wow" factor. Wu said you needed to give a sense of scale to your monsters. Bilmes thought some basic story-telling would help, along with characters you care about. Leeper said that no formula stays impressive, so just repeating past successes leads to failures.

Eggleton mentioned that the film *Always* has a cameo by Godzilla. Conversely, "*Godzilla: Final Wars* was never about Godzilla." There is a new Korean kaiju film coming out, *Dragon Wars*.

An audience member asked about Ultraman, but Eggleton said that was a superhero film, not kaiju. (Did the panel ever define "kaiju", I wonder? In any case, the description said "monster", which would be a larger category.)

Leeper told the story of the *North* Korean kaiju film, *Pulgasari*, which involved North Korea kidnapping the filmmakers and forcing them to make a kaiju film. Eggleton added that they also hited staff from Toho. The making of the film was described as "surreal"--the cast and crew were given the best of everything, etc.

Asked about *The Blob*, Leeper said it was a question of semantics as to whether that was kaiju or not. Eggleton seemed inclined to include it, since the jellyfish in *Dagora* counted.

The audience suggested other films: *The Attack of the Killer Tomatoes*, *Night of the Lepus*, *Jack the Giant Killer*, various 1950s films.

In addition to Godzilla, various other monsters appeared in multiple Godzilla films. For example, Gigan was in three, and the "Peanuts" make multiple appearances. Apparently the Japanese do not care *why* they are small, which is why we never find out.

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                 Lyrics to the "Peanuts" Mothra Song

                  Malay (the actual language used)

                          Mosura ya Mosura
                          Dongan kasakuyan
                              Indo muu
                          Rusuto uiraadoa
                          Hanba hanbamuyan
                          Randa banunradan
                            Tounjukanraa
                           Kasaku yaanmu

                              Japanese

                          Mosura ya Mosura
                       Tasukete yo te yobeba
                            Toki o koete
                            Umi o koete
                      Nami no yo ni yatte kuru
                             Mamorigami
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Mosura ya Mosura
Yasashisasae wasure
Arehateta
Hito no kokoro
Inorinagara utau
Ai no uta

English

Mothra O Mothra
If we were to call for help
Over time
Over sea
Like a wave you'd come
Our guardian angel

Mothra O Mothra
Of forgotten kindness
And ruined spirits
We pray for the people's
Spirit as we sing

Leeper mentioned the new Gamera films. Eggleton said that the first three were fabulous, but that *Gamera the Brave* was not as good. Daei studios went broke in 1971, but had other problems as well. They apparently used real rats for some film, and the rats infested the studios with fleas. This is why they decided to switch to a turtle. Leeper said that the new Gamera films were better than the Godzilla films of that time. (In some context he added that "*Catwomen of the Moon* [was] not as quality as it sounds."

Eggleton recommended the YouTube video "Godzilla in My Life". Leeper said that the thing about a Godzilla attack is that "you can't just take it in your stride, you have to take it in his stride--and that's a pretty big stride."

An audience member asked about the American Godzilla film. (This is referred to as "GINA" by Godzilla aficionados, standing for "Godzilla In Name Only".) Eggleton said that they paid a $200 million licensing fee for the name. He said that with Matthew Broderick, he kept expecting a "Ferris Bueller moment." It was a decent monster, he added, just not Godzilla.

There were lots of requests for identification of various Kaiju from descriptions. (At one point someone responded to a request with, "Is it Orga?" and the asker said, "No, I know what Orga looks like," which stuck everyone as funny.)

One of my favorites is King Caesar, a large Okinawan dog in *Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla*. Apparently Hedora the Smog Monster is a favorite toy in Japan (along with the "Save the Earth" song).

At the end, an audience member asked, "Is the Godzilla franchise dead?" to which Eggleton shot back, "Are you kidding?"

What Happened to Novels Under 300 Pages?
Wednesday, 1:00PM
Liz Gorinsky (mod), Mark Graham, Milt Stevens

Description: "Most of Heinlein's early novels wouldn't even make it to press in the 21st century, and Tolkien's 'trilogy' might well have come out as one volume! Why does the modern market demand longer and longer books, and how is this affecting SF storytelling?"

Attendance: 40

Graham said that he reviews for the *Rocky Mountain News*, and almost never has said, "This book was too short." He also taught science fiction in high school for twenty years. (My, how times have changed since I was in high school!)

Stevens called himself a "professional fan", having spent fifty years in fandom, and observed that what people want to buy and what to want to sell have only tangential relationship to each other.

Gorinsky felt that 320 to 432 pages was the "Golden Area". The current problem, she said, seemed to be the market demanding longer books but also demanding a maximum price not commensurate with that.

Stevens opined, "In the beginning, there were dime novels." Then these were repackaged as pulp magazines. He thinks that part of the decline of literacy in kids today is because of the disappearance of trashy stuff for kids to read. In 1952, the major distributor quit distributing pulp magazines, and that killed those. Then there were digest-sized magazines, most of which were killed by the competition from television. Then there were paperbacks. (Obviously, there is some overlap in these eras.)

Graham said that one sign that some books are too large was the news report that an older man reading the unabridged version of Stephen King's *The Stand* in bed had his chest caved in by the book! Graham also said that if had had read the unabridged version of *Stranger in a Strange Land*, instead of the shorter version that was first published, he never would have become a fan. He blames Stephen King for long books.

The average book Graham reads is about 350 pages (from the mid-200s to the 600s). He sets most aside at 482 pages, though with Neal Stephenson's *Anathem* he stopped at 313. For every eight books he starts, he reviews one. He is, not surprisingly, more likely to stick with the shorter novels.

As a digression, he said tends to skip over proper names with apostrophes and hyphens, which he feel are overused.

Stevens said that *I Remember Lemuria* was so unspeakably bad that when he was reading it, his wife thought he was having a heart attack (from all the noises he made).

Gorinsky asked how reviewers chose books. Graham said he was asked to choose local authors or the "return" of a major author after a long hiatus, but there was little other pressure regarding his selections. He avoids series books. If an author is coming to town for a reading or a signing, then he will try to review the book.

Stevens said that Hugo nominees are getting longer. Graham observed that Robert Charles Wilson won a Hugo for *Spin* and "his are tight." Wilson has never written anything doorstop-sized.

Gorinsky said that fantasy tends to be longer than science fiction, and some new authors take this to extremes when they submit a manuscript for a 1500-page book and say it is the first of a series of twelve. This is an extreme example of the feedback loop that does encourage authors to write longer books because they see longer books. But Graham seemed to think that it is the beginners who do the shorter novels.

Someone in the audience asked, "Where's the story-telling when you don't need a beginning, a middle, or an end?"

Gorinsky said that at one time Barnes & Noble limited hardbacks by mid-list writers to $24.95 or less, but they are loosening up somewhat. What will happen is that we will see smaller fonts, presumably

to keep the size, and hence the price, down. (But why are thick books more expensive? The font size issue seems to imply it is the physical object that drives the cost, not the intellectual effort by the author.)

Gorinsky said that marketing drives reviews. But an audience member said that they often see reviews that say, "This didn't need to be this long." So his question was, what lets people do this?

Gorinsky said that some authors are no longer edited. For example, the last Harry Potter book sold for $32.95, so there was no reason to edit it down to keep it short. And the schedule for best-selling authors gets so tight that there is no time for editing.

Stevens said, "Padding is by no means unusual in books," and gave as an example *Passage* by Connie Willis, and *Titan*, *Wizard*, and *Demon* by John Varley.

I noted that novellas in book form, or young adult novels, are shorter but not cheaper. Gorinsky said that the novellas were pretty much all small-press (e.g., Subterranean, PS). Stevens said that Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* (a novella) was published both in adult and young adult hardcover editions--and the young adult edition was cheaper!

Gorinsky said that the truth is that it is hard to publish a hardcover for under $20. (But I see young adult novels under this all the time.) E. L. Doctorow's novels are 40,000 to 50,000 words (at the low end for eligibility as a novel for the Hugo award), and they sell for $22 or $23.

Someone suggested that original paperbacks could be shorter, but Gorinsky said that this was much harder now because the nature of the mass-market paperback field had changed. Apparently, she said, this method of publishing only works for "paranormal romance" or "vampire-slut urban fantasy."

Another suggestion was a short novel with a few short stories added in the same volume to pad it out. Graham said that name authors do not do short stories. (I suspect we may differ on our definition of "name authors".) Gorinsky said that the conventional wisdom is that collections do not sell. (Of course, fix-up novels apparently do sell, and they are just specialized collections.)

As one person summed it up, "No one will do it until everyone does it, but no one is doing it, because no one is doing it."

Someone else suggested that readers can do their own editing with a black marker, and observed that the growth of the novel parallels the switch to word processors/computers.

Stevens claims that the first really long science fiction novel was *Dune*. (I am not sure how he would count Olaf Stapledon's *Last and First Men*.)

Someone noted that prices go up for older books even though they are shorter. Someone else said, "With the exception of romance novels, all novels have been getting longer." Graham said that mysteries should also be excluded. Gorinsky said all this just reflected a hunger in society for longer narratives (e.g., mini-series).

(Why do people say that *Moby Dick* or *Ben-Hur* are so long, when they are actually shorter than a lot of today's books?)

2008: The Year in SF
Wednesday, 2:30PM
Charles Brown, David Hartwell, Jonathan Strahan, Gary Wolfe

Description: "The year's not over yet, but our panelists already have some striking suggestions about what's best and most interesting in the world of SF for 2008."

Attendance: 70

Brown said it was a great year for novels, in fact, the best in a decade. He particularly cited *City at the End of Time* by Greg Bear (which he said was about deep time, and a sequel of sorts to William Hope Hodgson's *Nightland*), *The Night Sessions* by Ken MacLeod, *Saturn's Children* by Charles Stross, and *Incandescence* by Greg Egan. (Of the latter, he noted, "If you read Greg Egan novels, you have to *work* at it.") Alastair Reynolds's *House of Suns* is a "sprawling space opera" and there is also Karl Schroeder's *Pirate Sun* (the third in a four-book series). Hartwell added that Vernor Vinge and Larry Niven are fans of the latter.

Wolfe thought that *The Quiet War* was the best work that Paul McAuley has done in years. *Flood* by Stephen Baxter (the first book in a duology) is a rethinking of S. Fowler Wright's *Deluge*. Wolfe also said that Ursula K. LeGuin's *Lavinia* is her best adult novel in years. *Anathem* has a space opera that starts on page 600, but the rest, he said, "tests your devotion to Neal Stephenson."

Hartwell observed that he had edited many of these. He added recommendations for *The January Dancer* by Michael Flynn ("a great space opera ... like Doc Smith and Cordwainer Smith together"), *An Evil Guest* by Gene Wolfe (his choice for the best), *Pandemonium* by Daryl Gregory, and *The Red Wolf Conspiracy* by Robert V. S. Redick.

Regarding short fiction, Strahan said that 3000 to 3500 stories per year used to be the estimate, but now it is closer to 10,000. We are seeing the rise of the original anthology (after it had been virtually killed in the 1970s). He predicted that print magazines may have come back in 2008 (this was become the economy tanked). *F&SF* is the best by a wide margin, he said, and *Asimov's* is second. The best original anthologies are *The Del Rey Book of Science Fiction & Fantasy* edited by Ellen Datlow, and *Galactic Empires* edited by Gardner Dozois. The on-line magazines still lag far behind the print formats.

Wolfe said that new writers to watch include Ted Kosmatka and Daryl Gregory. Stand-out stories include "Hob Carpet" and "The Tear" (both by Ian R. MacLeod), "Lost Continent" (or possibly "Crystal Nights") by Greg Egan, "Pride & Prometheus" by John Kessel, "Special Economics" by Maureen McHugh, "Art of Alchemy" by Ted Kosmatka, "Shuggoths in Bloom" by Elizabeth Bear, "Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom" by David Mauls, and probably quite a few others I could not write down fast enough.

Hartwell recommended *Little Brother* by Cory Doctorow, but Wolfe thought it had "too many shortcuts" to be great; he described it as having a "post-Pinkwater sensibility." Hartwell also thought the print magazines were on an up-swing, saying that there were "some issues where *all* the stories are good."

In original anthologies, Hartwell mentioned *Solaris* edited by George Mann, *Fast Forward* edited by Lou Anders, *Extraordinary Engines* edited by Nick Gevers, and the anthologies done by Anne and Jeff VanderMeer. Strahan said that *Extraordinary Engines* falls prey to "the [theme] anthology disease," and also that writers known for steampunk do not want to write it anymore.

Wolfe recommended Paolo Bacigalupi's collection *Pump 6*. He also commented on the various different "Best of" anthologies, which provide different views of what is best in the field.

Hartwell thought that in addition to original anthologies, this was a decade of great single-author collections. He seconded the recommendation for *Pump 6*, describing it as "pure bracing gloom" and saying it was "a combination of Barry Malzberg and Harlan Ellison." Strahan recommended the Ken Scholes collection due out in November (*Long Walks, Last Flights, and Other Strange Journeys*), as well as *Seeds of Change* (an anthology of novellas edited by John Joseph Adams), *Magic in the Mirrorstone* (Steve Berman), *Paper Cities* (Ekaterina Sedia), and *A Book of Wizards* (Michael Hague).

Brown said that young adult books were the "new kid on the block," something I definitely agree with. He did not elaborate, but I think part of it is the appeal of a stand-alone novel that is not 600 pages long, and costs less than $20. Brown also said that the web sites for *Strange Horizons* and *Clarkesworld* have some good stories but are spotty. Hartwell recommended the print sources *Interzone* and *Postscripts*, and said that *Analog* was having a good year.

Someone in the audience recommended *Grantville Gazette* (now only on-line, and in any case dedicated to stories and articles about Eric Flint's "Ring of Fire").

Strahan said that *The Steel Remains* was a change of direction for Richard Morgan, and also suggested Karl Schoeder's "Sun of Suns" series.

At the end, someone asked the panelists what they would like to see written that isn't. Strahan immediately said, "Short novels," and Hartwell agreed.

Chronological Dissonance: Modern Archetypes & Morals in a Historical Setting
Thursday, 10:00AM
Haley Elizabeth Garwood, Walter Hunt (mod), Laura Frankos, Patricia Wrede

Description: "Nothing is more off putting to the reader than a glaring anachronism in a time travel or alternate history setting. But surely this can extend to attitudes and beliefs as well as language, settings, and mechanical devices. How does the author keep his characters from acting like anachronisms themselves?"

Attendance: 50

[My archetypal example of "chronological dissonance" is the final scene of the Keira Knightley *Pride and Prejudice*, in which Elizabeth and Darcy are sitting together on the balcony in *dishabile*, looking extremely un-19th century. An audience member said that for her, it was tomatoes in 11th century France.]

Hunt said of instances of chronological dissonance that "the worst of them are not just distractions, but speed bumps." He addressed the authors in the audience, saying, "Your readers find this stuff. Worse, your readers go looking for this stuff. You know who you are." Given that, he asked, "Do you [the author] immerse yourself first?"

Garwood said she does a huge amount of research--anthropology, law, philosophy, food, medicine, botany, zoology, etc.--and added, "And then sometimes you have to fake it."

Wrede said that she starts with the plot or characters and who they are defines the background. Frankos said the same--the story and characters come first. There is always the problem of modern attitudes versus those of earlier ages. The attitudes of today contrast with the standard operating procedures of even just fifty years ago. For example, Dorothy Sayers has all sorts of anti-Semitic remarks in her books that no one even commented on at the time. This makes it a bit of a "juggling act" when writing earlier eras, according to Frankos.

Hunt asked if publishers or editors "push back" on attitudes of earlier eras. Wrede said that some do, but not much. Hunt noted that we can get the technology right easier than the society, and are likely to see something like, "Come on, baby, let's chow down," in the middle of a chunk of Arthurian prose. Garwood said, "Human beings are the same, but society shapes how they behave."

Someone asked about representing earlier languages. Garwood said that she writes fairly modern, but may avoid contractions. Wrede said that in *Snow White, Rose Red* she wanted to use Elizabethan English in the dialogue, but it was difficult. However, English is very flexible, she said, and has many different styles. Frankos said that writing *Ruled Britannia* using Elizabethan English was very hard

for her husband (Harry Turtledove).

In answer to various questions, the panelists tried to avoid Americanisms in historical writing (unless it was set in America, on assumes). One must be careful of word choice. Wrede cited a story set in 1808 which had someone refer anachronistically to a telegraph. Frankos said that Turtledove worked hard to make sure there were no Native American words in his "Sim" stories (in which there were no Native Americans). This meant, among other thing, that he had to find a new name for the woodchuck. (How hard could that be? Even now, it is also called a groundhog.) Wrede said that one problem is that "there's always somebody who knows more than you do."

Someone in the audience pointed out that Jo Walton weeded out all French cognates from a book of hers set in A.D. 800 in England. This led someone else to mention Poul Anderson's story "Uncleftish Beholding" where all Latin cognates have been changed to Germanic ones. It begins, "For most of its being, mankind did not know what things are made of, but could only guess. With the growth of worldken, we began to learn, and today we have a beholding of stuff and work that watching bears out, both in the workstead and in daily life. The underlying kinds of stuff are the *firststuffs*, which link together in sundry ways to give rise to the rest. Formerly we knew of ninety-two firststuffs, from waterstuff, the lightest and barest, to ymirstuff, the heaviest." (What is less known is that Anderson once wrote up the minutes of a Worldcon business meeting the same way--you can read it at http://www.smofinfo.com/wsfs/1960WSFSBMMinutes.doc.)

Hunt said that in historical settings, "humor has to rank as one of the hardest things to do." But some humor does transcend the problems; Hunt thought that *schadenfreude* might be one type that would.

Frankos gave bull-fighting and bear-baiting as examples of temporal cultural differences. Time travel, she said, can play on those differences, and cited Judith Tarr and Harry Turtledove's *Household Gods* as an example.

Wrede said that reading diaries and memoirs (and other primary sources) was the best way to do research. Hunt said that Googlebooks and Project Gutenberg made it easier to do that than it used to be.

Wrede re-iterated, however, that no matter how much checking you do, you *will* miss something. Hunt gave as an example something as basic as the mathematical constant pi. Until 1720, it was called "Archimedes' Constant", and then after that, pi. (A similar mathematical chronological dissonance was in Adam Roberts's "Swiftly", in which a character in the 18th or 19th century refers to a "zero-sum game"--a term not invented until the 20th century.)

Someone in the audience said that people may be the same in different historical periods, but characters in literature are different, that there is a different notion of character. Hunt said that there are indeed stock characters, etc. Another person described characters as "vessels into which the author pours."

Fred Lerner compared some of this to cinema, saying that Baird Searles said that the film *Barry Lyndon* was "filmed in the 18th Century," by which he may have meant that the lighting was purposely 18th century lighting, and so on.

Wrede mentioned the "imitative fallacy": do not write a scene where the character is bored in a boring way. One problem is that the pace of modern works is much faster than before, so you have the problem of either pacing it to match the period, or pacing it to match modern readers/viewers. Garwood said there was also such problems as needing to bridge the long periods it takes to build or move an army. Hunt thought this was an advantage of longer novels; two-hundred-page novels have things happening too fast even for today. Wrede felt that Wolfe's *Soldier of the Mist* managed to overcome these problems.

Someone suggested that Homer had an entirely different idea of what was appropriate to write about, but Hunt noted, "Anybody who was in that audience is already dead [so we are not selling to them.]"

History & Alternate History
Thursday, 11:30AM
Walter Hunt, John Maddox Roberts, Steven Silver, John Strickland (mod), Harry Turtledove,

Description: "Some authors write about the way things really happened, and others write about how they might have happened differently. At times, it can be hard to differentiate between the two! How much historical training do authors need to believably change the web of events?"

Attendance: 100

Strickland began by dividing alternate histories into three types:

- A timeline which is just different (e.g., *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*)
- A timeline which is different because of time-travel-initiated intervention (e.g. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*)
- Multiple alternatives ("crosstime") (e.g., Poul Anderson's "Time Patrol" series)

Silver added a fourth: a magical timeline (e.g., Randall Garrett's "Lord Darcy" stories).

Turtledove talked about a dichotomy between good and bad alternate histories, and Silver said, "A bad one is one I don't like." Often this is because he finds himself saying, "There's no way to get that to happen." For example, Silver said of Steve Barnes's "Zulu" books that "it's a good [series] but a bad alternate history." Often, he said, bad alternate histories are those in which "the historical individuals do not act like their actual characters." He gave as an example the story with Mother Teresa as a terrorist in *Alternate Outlaws*. Roberts said that this is the pitfall of having one's own hobby-horses (or agendae).

Hunt said that a major problem is that people do not know anything about history except for World War II and the (American) Civil War. Turtledove said that when he submitted *Agent of Byzantium* the editor did not know what was different and what was not.

Roberts also complained about the writers who do not understand how history works, and who think that just because Rome never fell in their story, fashions would never change either.

[I am reminded of Turtledove's anthology *Alternate Generals*, for which the publisher forgot to include the explanatory introductions to each story, and many readers were completely baffled.]

Hunt said that Mary Gentle's *Book of Ash* and *1610: A Sundial in a Grave* tended to be obscure as to the actual points of divergence, but it is fun to figure them out.

Turtledove said that reading an alternate history makes him more interested in the real history. It is a "funhouse mirror to our world."

Silver said there were two approaches to writing an alternate history: start with the point of divergence and extrapolate the effects, or start with what you want the current world and figure out how to bring it about.

Roberts said that alternate history gives the author "sheer scope for self-indulgence": you can have Vikings, Mongols, Aztecs, and Comanches all in one battle. Turtledove immediately responded, "*Journey to Fusang*!" (Of course, what I want are characters, not battle plans.)

Turtledove said that research is obviously important, but you should not tell too much. Avoid something that screams, "I've done my homework and you're going to suffer."

Someone asked why alternate history was so popular. Silver immediately responded, "Turtledove." He explained that in 1992 Turtledove wrote *Guns of the South*, it was successful, and the publishers commissioned more. Authors started to submit more alternate history manuscripts. Gregory Benford edited a series of four reprint anthologies titled "What Might Have Been" ("Empires", "Heroes", "Wars", and "America") and this further fueled the boom, as did the original anthologies Mike Resnick edited, notably *Alternate Presidents* and *Alternate Kennedys*, stories from which garnered several Hugo nominations. Eventually, alternate history went mainstream, with Robert Harris's *Fatherland*, Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America*, and Michael Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*.

Turtledove disagreed. He felt that in the 1980s the solar system was discovered to be less "user-friendly" than we had previously thought. Also, there were what he described as "escaped academics with history degrees."

Roberts said that when he mentioned some of the leading writers of alternate history to his publisher, the latter said he was "not aware of these people." "Such is fame in our field," Turtledove lamented.

Silver said that alternate history uses the same techniques as science fiction to develop the story: ask "what if [something]?" and then develop the story from there. This, he pointed out, is exactly what Hal Clement does.

Roberts made the obligatory mention of the competing theories of "Great Man" and "Tide of History". He also cited Leiber's "Law of the Conservation of Reality" (even when you make changes, reality tends to go back to the way it was). (This sounds a bit like "Tide of History" to me.) Hunt said that one common mistake is that historical characters who would not be important in the alternate timeline (or would not even exist) are still in some stories. (One example of this would be Martin Luther King, Jr., in *The Two Georges* by Richard Dreyfus and Harry Turtledove.) Silver says this is really a short cut for the author. For example, Naomi Novick's "Temeraire" series does this; it is fun, but it is not good alternate history.

Strickland talked about the "butterfly effect": if a butterfly flaps its wings in China, it can cause a hurricane in Florida. Some authors realize this, but some do not, and have changes with not nearly enough effect. (Strickland explained the butterfly effect, saying that he knows science so he latches on to that.)

Strickland about the panelists what they thought about the morality of changing the past, but no one seemed to pick up on this. I suppose the fact that it is all fictional makes it less pressing.

An audience member suggested the application of the Emerging Knowledge Theory of History: "When it's time to railroad, you railroad." This is, so far as I can tell, this is yet another version of the "Tide of History".

Hunt claimed that he wrote an alternate history for a college admittance application. (Think about it.)

Someone asked about multiverse theories. Hunt said in the field of alternate histories you seem to have mathematicians versus historians.

Someone in the audience asked about the "open" nature of the Eric Flint's "1632" universe, where readers are invited to write their own stories in that timeline. Strickland said that he likes it, but he also likes individual authors writing their own ideas. Silver said the "1632" timeline is "one of the most successful shared world universes."

Joseph Major said that there were two novels coming out based on Martin Allen's forgeries about World War II. Turtledove said, "I have seen this crap online and I'm f'ing sick of it."

Someone closed with the question of whether we were going to see a grand synthesis of all Turtledove's timelines.

Timeless Stars: Olaf Stapledon
Thursday, 2:30PM
John Hertz, Evelyn Leeper (mod), Robert Silverberg

Description: "A retrospective on a critically acclaimed author who gave shape to the science fiction genre during the first half of the 20th century."

Attendance: 50

[It is difficult to take notes when one is on the panel, so instead of strictly writing up the panel, I will include the article I wrote based on it, which does include most of what I took notes on.]

One reason I never catch up on my reading list is that I keep adding to it in arguably insane ways. For example, each month I have three new reading group books, and each year I have five Hugo novels (and fifteen somewhat shorter pieces). And then there are the conventions.

You see, I am just conscientious (a.k.a. crazy) enough when assigned as moderator to a panel on Olaf Stapledon to decide I have to try to re-read every I have by (and about) him. (Thank God they did not put me on a panel about Robert Silverberg or Edgar Rice Burroughs!) In any case, I managed only Stapledon's four major novels, and three books of literary criticism of Stapledon.

[I say "four major novels", but *Last and First Men* and *Star Maker* are not really novels in any traditional sense. They had not characters in the usual sense--even the few individuals discussed in them are most archetypes than characters. Someone described counterfactuals as "alternate history with characterization" and that seems a reasonable parallel. However, I will occasionally use the term "novel" in referring to Stapledon's major works; just translate that as "work of fiction.")

Let me start by saying that re-reading the books that one enjoyed immensely years ago may be a depressing experience, especially when supplemented by reading critical commentary. For example, I recently re-read Asimov's "Foundation Trilogy" and Joseph F. Patrouch's comments on it. Patrouch observes that the Second Foundation says that the destruction of the planet Tazenda and its "many millions" was necessary because the ends justify the means: "The alternative would have been a much greater destruction generally throughout the Galaxy over a period of centuries." Patrouch points out that this sort of justification has been used by people of less than savory reputations, and he has definite moral problems with it. And in Stapledon's work, one also finds some supposedly good (or at worst, morally neutral) acts that we would similarly condemn. So, while I loved works such as *Last and First Men* years ago, the negative aspects are now much more obvious.

First, an overview of *Last and First Men* (1930). In its Dover edition it is 246 pages, or about 130,000 words. (All page numbers given are for the two Dover omnibus editions of Stapledon works.) This is really the equivalent of a standard 500-page book. Pretty much everyone who reads this is fascinated by Stapledon's idea of "Deep Time". And it is Stapledon's idea. The only real predecessor that looked at the far future was H. G. Wells in *The Time Machine*, and he want only to A.D. 802,701 for the Eloi and 30,000,000, for the end of the world.

Stapledon, on the other hand, gives us five time scales. Time Scale 1 (page 56) goes to 4000 (that is, 2000 years forward as well as 2000 backward). Time Scale 2 (page 99) goes 200,000 years each way. Time Scale 3 (page 141) goes 20 million years each way. Time Scale 4 (page 213) goes 2 (American) billion years each way, and Time Scale 5 (also page 213) goes 10 trillion years each way. (On the

final one a single entry on the timeline says, "Planets formed; end of Man"!) When I first read this, I fell in love with the timelines.

Of course, now I notice all sorts of problems. I must have noticed his description of the Jews (page 67) even then:

"One other race, the Jews, were treated with a similar combination of honour and contempt, but for very different reasons. In ancient days their general intelligence, and in particular their financial talent, and co-operated with their homelessness to make them outcasts; and now, in the decline of the First Men, they retained the fiction, if not strictly the fact of racial integrity. They were still outcasts, though indispensable and powerful. Almost the only kind of intelligent activity which the First Men could still respect was financial operation, whether private or cosmopolitan. The Jews had made themselves invaluable in the financial organization of the world state, having far outstripped the other races because they alone had preserved a furtive respect for pure intelligence. And so, long after intelligence had come to be regarded as disreputable in ordinary men and women, it was expected of the Jews. In them it was called satanic cunning, and they were held to be embodiments of the powers of evil, harnessed in the service of Gordelphus. Thus in time the Jews had made something like "a corner" in intelligence. This precious commodity they used largely for their own purposes; for two thousand years [sic] of persecution had long ago rendered them permanently tribalistic, subconsciously if not consciously. Thus when they had gained control of the few remaining operations which demanded originality rather than routine, they used this advantage chiefly to strengthen their own position in the world. For, though relatively bright, they had suffered much of the general coarsening and limitation which had beset the whole world. Though capable to some extent of criticizing the practical means by which ends should be realized, they were by now wholly incapable of criticizing the major ends which had dominated their race for thousands of years. In them intelligence had become utterly subservient to tribalism. There was thus some excuse for the universal hate and even physical repulsion with which they were regarded; for they alone had failed to make the one great advance, from tribalism to a cosmopolitanism which in other races was no longer merely theoretical. There was good reason also for the respect which they received, since they retained and used somewhat ruthlessly a certain degree of the most distinctively human attribute, intelligence."

[I realize that I spend a lot of time in my columns commenting on authors' attitudes towards Jews. For Stapledon, I could have pulled out passages showing his apparent prejudice against Africans, or Asians, or women. But I figure I should choose the category I know the best. There was, however, a certain irony in that all three panelists at Worldcon were Jewish.]

And Stapledon's notion of the effects of time does not seem to match our current knowledge. For example, he claims that the forms of buildings are still visible after 100,000 years (page 76). The recent documentary "Life After People" looked at the effects of time on untended building and materials. After only 10,000 years, they say, iron corrodes, concrete crumbles, and wood and paper decay. All that will remain (according to the documentary) would be the Great Wall, the Great Pyramid, Hoover Dam, and the most enduring of all, Mount Rushmore. Stapledon can be forgiven for not mentioning the last two--they were not completed until after *Last and First Men* was published. (I am surprised "Life After People" did not mention the Crazy Horse monument, though.)

Stapledon does predict a lot of current and predicted future problems: atomic energy, oil and coal shortages, metal shortages, and so on (page 73). He even has Arctic islands and Antarctica melting, though with no comments on rising ocean levels (page 62).

In *Olaf Stapledon* (Starmont Reader's Guide 21), John Kinnaird says that Stapledon's publishers pressed him for a sequel to *Last and First Men* (page 51), proof that sequelitis is not new. I find it ironic that Stapledon wrote the entire future history of humanity/mankind all the way to its end with the destruction of the Solar System--and his publisher wanted a sequel! (Perhaps even more ironic is that Stapledon produced one.)

(Kinnaird lists Stapledon's "principal heirs" as Brian W. Aldiss, James Blish, Sir Arthur C. Clarke, Ursula K. LeGuin, Stanislaw Lem, Clifford D. Simak, and Cordwainer Smith. Many would also include Poul Anderson, even if only for TAU ZERO.)

I skipped *Last Men in London*, Stapledon's second novel, feeling it was more important to refresh myself about his four primary novels. His third novel, ODD JOHN (1935), is a superman story. If *Last and First Men* was inspired by H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine*, then *Odd John* may have owed something to Philip Wylie's *Gladiator* (which preceded it by five years). I cannot say for sure my reaction to John the first time I read it, but this time around he seemed a thoroughly reprehensible sort, willing to commit murder, human experimentation, and even genocide without any compunction, because he is, after all, a superior being. Once again, we have Stapledon presenting a very fascist, racialist view of the world, and we have the distressing feeling that he endorses it rather than shows it as a warning. The narrator is called "Fido" by John, and a fair name it is, as "Fido" shows a ridiculously high level of devotion to John--and a low level of moral concern.

[On the panel, Robert Silverberg pointed out that liking the main character was not necessary for a book to be great, or even good, e.g., *Crime and Punishment*, or *Lolita*. In fact, there was a long digression into *Lolita* and whether Humbert Humbert was not indeed the victim and Lolita the most negative character. Also presented was the notion of Odd John as a superior character with a tragic flaw, a la classic Greek drama. All this is true, and the parallel to Greek drama is the most convincing argument to me. I guess it was the feeling that I was supposed to sympathize at least somewhat that bothered me, and when people say they like this book because they read it when they were young and felt that they were outsiders the way John was, that just reinforces my feeling.]

Star Maker (1937) is the most poetical of the four major novels. It is also the least science fictional, in the sense of being more a work of fantasy, or even of theosophy, than of science fiction. While Stapledon discusses planets, stars, galaxies, and so on, his basis is not science. Indeed, his notion of the mechanics of planetary formation is very outdated: "I knew well that the birth of planets was due to the close approach of two or more stars, and that such accidents must be very uncommon." (page 266)

He also misunderstands evolution, saying, "Presently the stage was clear for some worm or amoeba to reinaugurate the great adventure of biological evolution toward the human plane." (page 331) Stapledon assumes that evolution has an ultimate goal and that that goal is humanity (or intelligence, if you prefer). But this is not true--the "goal" of evolution (or rather, its effect) is creating organisms best suited for their environment.

In *Star Maker*, Stapledon again describes most (if not all) the advanced world orders as communistic, but in a very Stalinist way: "Indeed, a highly specialized bureaucracy, or even a world-dictator, might carry out the business of organizing the world's activity with legally absolute power, but under constant supervision by popular will expressed through the radio. We were amazed to find that in a truly awakened world even a dictatorship could be in essence democratic." (page 348) Stapledon seems either amazingly obtuse, or amazingly optimistic, in 1937 to still expect that a dictatorship could be so benign and so easily controlled. (Isn't the very essence of absolute power the ability to silence one's opponents?)

But as Leslie Fiedler says in *Olad Stapledon: A Man Divided*, Stapledon's goal was not scientific (or economic), and later science fiction writers "are responding to the challenge which Stapledon made clear constituted a chief raison d'etre for the genre: to replace traditional mythologies of a universe tailored to the human scale with one which--without falsifying the findings of modern science or denying the terror they have stirred in all our hearts--can redeem them for the imagination." (page 348)

Star Maker is in many ways primarily a book of poetry. In Stapledon's "On every side was confusion, a rising storm, great waves already drenching our rock. And all around, in the dark welter, faces and

appealing hands, half-seen and vanishing" (page 431), for example, I hear the influence of Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach":

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And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.
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The last of Stapledon's major novels is *Sirius* (1944), about a dog brought up to human intelligence. This may be the most accessible of Stapledon's fiction. Just as Stapledon's other works seemed to have been inspired or influenced by earlier writers, *Sirius* seems to be a descendent of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (perhaps by way of Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau*). The Frankenstein connection is most obvious when Sirius bemoans his isolation, saying, "Why did you make me without a world for me to live in. It's as though God made Adam and not bothered to make Eden, nor Eve...."

On the other hand, some of the old attitudes are still there. The mother of Sirius's human companion, Plaxy, has been convinced to raise Plaxy and Sirius together equally, and when Sirius is injured, feels the same love toward him she feels toward Plaxy. Now, I am not a mother, but I can't help but feel that a human mother would feel more love and attachment to a human child than to a dog, no matter how much the two were raised together. This makes Elizabeth another in the line of women that Stapledon seems to get wrong--mostly by making them almost sub-human.

Stapledon was chosen for the first Cordwainer Smith Rediscovery Award (given annually by Readercon). (Silverberg was on the jury that year.) Why Stapledon is neglected, or indeed whether he is neglected, was discussed. Among average readers, he is virtually unknown. but among science fiction authors he is often a major influence (see quotes below). Pretty much everyone in the audience had read him, but that is not too surprising. Most obviously, panels of this sort about particular authors attract readers of that author. But also, the sort of person likely to go to a panel on any older author is likely to be the sort that reads older authors in general. That is, someone who has read only science fiction published in the last ten years is unlikely to go to any retrospective panel, even on better-known authors such as Heinlein or Asimov.

Silverberg thought one reason for the neglect was that Stapledon had never been published in mass-market paperback. This turns out not to be true--there were Berkley mass-market editions of *Odd John* and *Star Maker* in the 1960s, and Penguin editions of *Sirius* and *Last and First men*/*Last Men in London* (omnibus edition) in the 1970s, as well as a Sphere edition of *Nebula Maker*. But those these came and went fairly quickly, the irony is that Stapledon is one of the few science fiction authors of the 1930s who has had his major works in print continuously for the last half century or so. Dover Books has had his four major works of fiction in print as two omnibus editions at least since I was in college. So while in some ways neglected, Stapledon is also in some ways the most available of science fiction authors. (Silverberg, I believe, referred to him as the "least neglected unjustly neglected author.")

And a few quotes about Olaf Stapledon:

Sir Arthur C. Clarke [on *Last and First Men*]: "With its multimillion year vistas, and its roll call of great but doomed civilizations, the book produced an overwhelming impact on me."

Freeman Dyson [on *Star Maker*]: "It seemed to me perfectly obvious that this was the way to think about space and about the future--that kind of broad scope, that kind of scale."

Stanislaw Lem [on *Last and First Men* and *Odd John*]: "[These] opened new endless perspectives, gigantic possibilities for an ongoing construction of hitherto unarticulated hypotheses."

Classic SF Films I'd Like to Remake
Thursday, 4:00PM

Christopher Becker (mod), Richard Chwedyk, Mark Leeper, James Nelson Lucas, Misty Massey panelists

Description: "Is another film version of War of the Worlds really going to give us anything different? How do film makers deal with an audience that loves or hates particular bits of a previous movie? Are there still any stories that really need to be remade for a wider audience in the HD world?"

Attendance: 30

Becker started by saying he would like to see a remake of *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. Because it was Disney, he said, it missed a lot of layers. (He also said he would like to see film versions of Connie Willis's *Doomsday Book* and William Gibson's *Idoru*, which was a bit off topic.)

Chwedyk said that Ray Bradbury wrote a screenplay of *Something Wicked This Way Comes* for Sam Pekinpah earlier. Chwedyk also said that the special effects took the nuance out of the story. Massey said that when Hollywood made *The Dark Is Rising* into *The Seeker* they changed everything *and* made it into a Christian-based story.

Chwedyk said that Robert Zemeckis said that Hollywood would let him do anything "as long as the cost is under a million dollars a minute."

Leeper said that a candidate for remaking would be *The Land That Time Forgot*, which was good except for the special effects (so they should use the same script).

Lucas suggested Damon Knight's "To Serve Man" as a film, but Leeper said that the pun would not work. (It certainly would not sustain a feature-length movie.)

Becker reminded us, "Not all remakes are bad." However, often one should approach a remake from a different point of view. In some sense, for example, *Cloverfield* is a remake of *Godzilla*. Leeper reminded the audience that the original *Godzilla* was grim and dark, not like the later "monster-fests". Chwedyk said that *Cloverfield* is not a remake, but a re-imagining.

Pete Rubinstein suggested remaking *Metropolis* to make it more accessible to modern audiences. I pointed out that they tried this once, in a manner of speaking, with the Georgio Moroder version.

Chwedyk suggested a remake of *Things to Come*. There was a sort of remake of this in 1979 (*The Shape of Things to Come*).

Someone in the audience suggested that foreign films were good candidates for remakes, such as *Solaris*. (Actually, I think this one is an argument against remaking foreign films.) Leeper said that the remake of *Solaris* captured the ponderousness of the original.

Someone else suggested *Dune*, leading Leeper to respond, "Third time's the charm?") Becker said that he liked the first version of *Dune* (by David Lynch), but not as an adaptation of the book. It was, he said, "very Lynchian."

Someone asked about "simultaneous remakes," by which they apparently meant two different versions of the story being filmed simultaneously. Hollywood used to do this with films destined for the foreign market. The best-known (and possibly only surviving example) of these are the Bela Lugosi and Carlos Villarías versions of *Dracula*. Leeper suggested that these should be called "co-makes". Another example he gave was that *F.P. 1 Doesn't Answer* was immediately remade from German to English, and possibly French. (Whether this was a true "co-make, or just an instantaneous remake was not clear.) Chwedyk said these were probably good, because "everything goes better with zeppelins."

Someone suggested a remake of *Forbidden Planet*, but done seriously. This led Becker to suggest that some films might be ripe for remaking because "it was a different time then" when the original was made. Chwedyk thought *Kiss Me Deadly* might fit this category; Lucas suggested *Repo Man*. Someone in the audience suggested *Silent Running*.

Leeper mentioned *Creation of the Humanoids*, saying that in it everything was bad but the script. This led someone else to suggest *Nightfall*, as the first version was terrible. Leeper pointed out that there have been *three* versions of Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* so far, and none were great.

Becker asked the flip-side question: what should not be remade? Lucas immediately said, "*The Day the Earth Stood Still*." Leeper suggested that anything can be remade effectively.

Leeper also asked if a film can really be called a remake if both are based on a book (or story)? For example, is Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* a remake of Laurence Olivier's? (Oddly enough, I think most people would say no, but might say that Branagh's *Henry V was* a remake of Olivier's!) Becker said that Gus Van Sant's *Psycho* was definitely a remake of the Hitchcock version, even though there was a book, because it used the same script! I found myself thinking this was like Jorge Luis Borges's Pierre Menard, only to hear Chwedyk say the same thing! Maybe it is reasonable to say that a remake of something must use some element not in the earlier source material.

Pete Rubinstein suggested that films like *Starcrash* should not be remade. Lucas said he wanted to see a Michael Bey remake of *The Monolith Monsters*.

Leeper closed with a comparison to other media, saying that he has seen a lot of paintings of the Temptation of St. Anthony, and in some sense they are all remakes. (This is even more true of the Crucifixion or the Annunciation, one presumes.)

(My thought was that because the odds of making a bad remake are high, there needs to be a big pay-off.)

The Movie Year in Review
Thursday, 5:30PM
Vincent Docherty, Daniel Kimmel (mod), Mark Leeper, Jim Mann

Description: "Seen a good movie lately? Our panel and audience will discuss science fiction and fantasy movies from the past year. What's hot and what's not?"

Attendance: [forgot to count]

The panelists worked primarily from a chronological list of 2008 releases.

Kimmel described the first film, *One Missed Call*, as "exorcism on a cell phone."

Mann said he liked *Cloverfield* after the first half hour (which was mostly setting up the characters). (Of course, the first half hour is just about half the actual film.) Leeper said that it was grim, like the original *Gojira*. Kimmel also liked it, saying it was *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* from the point of view of the crowds. Docherty said it seemed to have gotten its ideas of cimena verité from *The Blair Witch Project*.

Kimmel recommended *Teeth* (about a vagina dentata). He said, "You should have seen the men at the press screenings!"

Docherty thought *Jumper* was okay, but fragmented and patchy.

Mann and Leeper both said of *Spiderwick* that they would have liked it as a kid.

Docherty found *Penelope* "absolutely charming"; Kimmel said his twelve-year-old daughter liked it.

Leeper thought that George Romero has made too many zombie movies, and the hand-held aspect was not enough to justify *Diary of the Dead*.

Docherty described *10,000 B.C.* as "*Clan of the Cave Bear* meets *Stargate*," and best watched with beer and pizza, "with the emphasis on beer." Kimmel thought that while it was terrible history, it was not a boring film.

(In keeping with the notion of high concept, someone in the audience described *Doomsday* as "*Mad Max* meets *28 Days Later*.")

Someone thought that *Horton Hears a Who!* was like being hit over the head with a large fish, and this and the "Grinch" movies constituted war crimes. Kimmel, on the other hand, found *Horton* "absolutely delightful."

On the other hand, Kimmel said that *Funny Games* was horrible.

CJ7, from the director of *Shaolin Soccer* and *Kung Fu Hustle*, was mentioned but apparently not seen.

Of *Superhero Hero*, Docherty said, "I wish I had my ninety minutes back."

Kimmel said that *Prom Night* was a remake of *Schlock*.

Someone said that *Zombie Strippers* had been press-screened and lives up to its title. In it, one of the zombie strippers is reading Nietzsche and says, "He makes a lot more sense now."

Leeper thought that *Iron Man* was very hypocritical, being supposedly anti-war but generated most of its excitement by blowing things up. Mann, on the other hand, thought it the best superhero movie he had seen, and both Docherty and Kimmel also liked it. Kimmel described it as "the film Robert Douney, Jr., was born to make."

Kimmel thought that *Speed Racer* got an unfair rap.

Docherty thought that *Prince Caspian* was better than *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.

The Fall was about a silent-film stunt man who tells a fairy tale. Kimmel said he would not recommend it to most people, but thought the sorts of people at science fiction conventions might like it. (It is very stunning visually.)

War, Inc. has its moments, according to Kimmel.

Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull is too "New Age" and not enough archaeology, according to Leeper. Also, Harrison Ford is too old. Mann said that while he enjoyed it, he was also disappointed.

Kimmel said that *The Strangers* inexplicably made money.

Mann and Kimmel both thought *Kung Fu Panda* was fun. Kimmel said that Pixar is now the gold standard, and Dreamworks the silver.

Kimmel mentioned *Mother of Tears*, an Italian horror film.

The Happening is better than *Lady in the Water*, said Kimmel, but only because "*Lady* is one of the worst films I've ever seen."

According to Mann, *The Incredible Hulk* was a fun film but did not hold up after *Iron Man*, and he does not like the dumb Hulk. Kimmel found the CGI fights off-putting.

On the other hand, Kimmel found *Get Smart* amusing.

Everyone seemed to agree on *Wall-E*, though. Kimmel said it was one of the best films of the year (not just the best SF films, but all films). Mann said it was number one on his Hugo list. Leeper found it "very Clifford Simak-y," and Mann agreed that it had a lot of nods to science fiction art.

Wanted was done by the same director as *Nightwatch* and *Daywatch*. Kimmel described it as being over the top in story and having stunning visuals, and he said he was not bored for a minute. Leeper added that the fantasy keeps building as the film progresses.

Of *Hancock*, Kimmel said that he likes Will Smith and likes how Will Smith does science fiction, and that this was not as bad as *The Wild Wild West*.

Leeper said that Guillermo del Toro was better with horror than with comic books, and said that *Hellboy II: The Golden Army* was an example. Kimmel, however, thought that the sing-a-long in it was "one of the highlights of the year."

Leeper noted that *Journey to the Center of the Earth* was not an adaption of the Verne novel. Kimmel felt that Walden Media was at least attempting to get children to read books.

Meet Dave had Eddie Murphy and was "dumb fun," according to Kimmel.

Docherty said that *The Dark Knight* was pretty powerful and dark, serious and astonishing. Kimmel thought Heath Ledger gave an amazing performance as The Joker. Leeper was more ambiguously pleased, saying, "Only for a filmmaker as good as Christopher Nolan would this film be a step down." Mann thought it was a little long, and the Hong Kong sequence could have been removed.

Kimmel said that the audience for *Space Chimps* was those whose age was in the single digits. *Fly Me to the Moon* is the same sort of thing, hoping to get kids excited by the space program.

Mann described *The X Files: I Want to Believe* as a good, somewhat long episode of the show. Unfortunately, it seems to be of the "monster of the week" variety.

The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor was silly but not boring, according to Mann, and had a lot of humor in it.

Other films not on the list were also mentioned. Some were 2007 films that got very little notice at the time. Others were 2008 films overlooked by the list maker.

Leeper strongly recommended *The Man from Earth* and said that *Mongol* had some fantasy elements and a "Conan" feel.

Someone asked about the "Saw" films, to which Kimmel responded, "I loathe the 'Saw' films; I despise the 'Saw' films."

Of *Twilight*, Kimmel observed, "My problem is that I'm not a sixteen-year-old girl."

Leeper thought that overall there were too many comic-book films, and too many that were CGI-

heavy.

Twisting Time: Alternate Histories
Friday, 10:00AM
Moshe Feder (mod), Marilyn Kosmatka, S. M. Stirling, Charles Stross, Harry Turtledove

Description: "A discussion of Alternate History as a setting for stories. What does it take to make a story an Alternate History? How are these stories different? What are the limits an author must stay within?"

Attendance: 200

[A lot of this was repetition from the alternate history panel the previous day.]

Feder began by asking, "Why is alternate history science fiction?" There seem to be three answers:

1. History can be treated as a courtesy science (observational versus experimental).
2. The essence of science fiction is speculation, and alternate history uses the same speculative techniques.
3. Good alternate history creates the same sense of wonder as science fiction.

Turtledove said the answer is also that they use the same technique: "Change one thing and see what develops from that."

Stirling said it was because the science fiction section in the bookstore has alternate history in it. (This seems to be begging the question, though.)

Feder wondered whether Philip Roth was lying or just incredibly ignorant where he claimed his book *The Plot Against America* was original (in that it assumed a different course for World War II)?

Stross said that if one is using the notion of "compare and contrast," this implies multiple timelines. When he was writing the "Merchant Princes" series, he emulated Roger Zelazny's "Amber" books and H. Beam Piper's "Paratime" (though he emphasized that he differed from Piper in politics.).

Turtledove said that in academia, counterfactuals are common, but described them as "alternate history without characterization." (I have seen a depressing number of "stories" outside of academia which fit this description.)

Feder said that Keith Laumer's "Crosstime Imperium" stories were fun, and Turtledove described them as using a "Model T crosstime machine." However, Stross noted that they were not available in the Britain (the stories, not the time machine--though those are also unavailable). I'm not sure how available they are in the United States, for that matter.

Turtledove said that he was primarily influenced by Piper and L. Sprague de Camp, and told how reading *Lest Darkness Fall* was what led him into Byzantine history as a major, and alternate history as a writer. Feder said that he studied Latin because of Martin Padway (the time traveler in de Camp's *Lest Darkness Fall* who gets by in Rome because he knows Latin). Stirling pointed out a sequel, "The Apotheosis of Martin Padway" in *The Enchanter Completed*.

Kosmatka said her influences were Piper, de Camp, and Turtledove. Kosmatka has written *Timespike* with Eric Flint. I did not think of *Timespike* as alternate history, but Stirling said that it was because some modern grass was brought back in time which would have changed botanical history.

Stross said that the connection between time travel and alternate history paradoxes makes your head

hurt, leading Feder to respond, "But I like that kind of pain!" Stross observed that multiple timelines often help avoid paradoxes such as the "Grandfather Paradox". (Why is it always the "Grandfather Paradox" rather than the "Grandmother Paradox"? Is this another example of the oppressiveness of the patriarchal system?) This led to a long list of alternate history classics dealing with time travel, paradoxes, and time police.

[After I wrote the previous paragraph, I got "Vanamonde" #792, which includes a letter from Anton Lien which says, "[If] I go back in time and kill my grandfather ... I tell you the result of this act will prove nothing ... the obvious person to kill is your grandmother."]

Stross said his series came about when his agent asked him, "Why don't you build us a big fat fantasy series or alternate history series which I can sell and make us a lot of money?"

Stirling said that the appeal of alternate history is that everyone has something about which they wonder, "What if X were different?"

Stross made the obligatory mention of the "Great Man" versus "Tide of History" theories, and said he supports the "Tide of History". Stirling somewhat disagreed, saying that someone else might have discovered America, but many things would be different. Of course, alternate history is the ultimate non-falsifiable hypothesis.

Turtledove mentioned in passing that *Agent of Byzantium* concealed Masalama's rival monotheism, and this led to mention of other very early points of divergence. Feder noted that Robert Silverberg's "Roma Eterna" series blocks Islam from developing. Stirling recommended Poul Anderson's "In the House of Sorrows" (in which there is no return from the Babylonian Exile), and Turtledove mentioned his own "Counting Potsherds" (the Persians defeat the Greeks at Thermopylae and/or Salamis). Stross's "Merchant Princes" has no Christianity or Islam, but a sort of High Viking religion, and Feder said that Paul Park's "Roumania" series has an Egyptian-based society.

Turtledove said that all this was very relevant, because (for example) the Maccabees seemed to the second century B.C.E. Greeks must as Al-Qaeda seems to us. (Stirling noted that in Anderson's "Delenda Est" the Maccabees are suppressed.)

(It does seem to me as though alternative religious development is an overlooked sub-genre of alternate history, though clearly one fraught with danger.)

As to what the greatest challenge of alternate history is, Feder said it was to get it right. Kosmatka thought people should be less detail oriented and more social oriented--too many stories have all the values, etc., of our modern world.

Turtledove said that too many alternate histories have bad writing and bad extrapolation, and suffer from "I've done my homework and you're going to suffer." In particular, he thought that too many liberties were taken with real historical personages: "When dealing with historical figures, you're not projecting on a blank screen."

Stirling said that a lot of this is similar to other science fiction. There are too many people in science fiction alien situations who act just like us; "most science fiction aliens are less alien to us than the Japanese." He also decried implausible extrapolations. Stross thought that there were various (implausible) incidents that are considered fair game (e.g., Operation Sealion). Sealion *never* works; the Wehrmacht *always* gets wiped out in three days even if the British Army and Navy get wiped out.

Stross said that the problems in writing alternate histories are not only cultural differences, but what he called "the stupid factor." By this he meant that just because one is in a Bronze Age culture, that does not mean that the people are stupid. (A classic example of this is Poul Anderson's "The Man Who Came Early".)

Stirling's example in support of this indicates some cultural differences and may indicate some of his politics: "I don't think you'd get anyone in Gothic Rome to take paper money," Turtledove added, "Or plastic." (De Camp, writing in 1938, had Martin Padway use silver for money.)

Feder thought a better way to get rich than the ones one usually finds in time travel stories would be to write all the great pop songs of history. There were also discussions of skills (e.g., typing as a marketable skill of a hundred years ago), the differences between what a woman time traveler would experience versus what a man would. Stross recommended a book called *The Century of the Typewriter* and said that in Italy in the 1920s had hydraulic typewriters.

Stross also said that systems of government are dependent on types of office filing systems and technology.

Turtledove asked the other panelists how far to go in extrapolation. His answer was, "It depends on the story." In turn, Kosmatka, Stirling, and Stross all said, "It depends on the story." Feder just said, "Yeah."

One obvious difference between mainstream and science fiction, according to Feder, was that mainstream does not have to define everything, while science fiction works from scratch. Alternate history, he said, is somewhere in between.

Someone in the audience suggested that there is a spectrum in alternate history from too ignorant to too knowledgeable. Stross said that in his work he left a lot of clues that while the main stream was post-9/11, it still diverged from our timeline before 2003. Of all the clues, though, including one about Chemical Ali, bombing, etc., the only one *everyone* got was Paris Hilton's funeral.

Turtledove has had people ask him about whether *Agent of Byzantium* is alternate history. His response to them? "Rent a clue."

Stross said that parts of Jo Walton's *Farthing* may baffle some people. Turtledove said *Guns of the South* sometimes gets shelved as history.

Stross said that zeppelins seemed a certain alternate history trope, and Feder said from a publisher's standpoint, zeppelins on the cover signals alternate history.

Feder asked the panelists what were the most over-used points of divergence and conversely, what were the most overlooked.

Turtledove said the first question was easy: the (American) Civil War and World War II. As for overlooked, he said that World War I was the great "choke point" of the 20th century, not World War II.

Stirling agrees, but the problem is that with the Civil War and World War II, at least people know *something* about them, while they know nothing about King George II, William Pitt, or the Seven Years' War.

Stross said that one reason World War I was major was before it there were only two republics, and monarchies were standard. Stirling said that what is interesting is that there were many dates before 1914 when World War I almost started--1905, 1878, and others.

Feder said that there are usually considered to be three types of alternate history:

1. The straight alternate history not caused by any sort of intervention (e.g., *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*)
2. The time travel alternate history (e.g., *Lest Darkness Fall*)

3. The crosstime story (e.g., Poul Anderson's "Time Patrol" series)

To these, Feder said he might add a fourth category: magic works (e.g., Randall Garrett's "Lord Darcy" stories). Regarding this, though, Turtledove felt it made things too easy, quoting what Anna Russell said about opera: "You can do anything as long as you sing it." And Stirling said, "Where anything is possible, nothing is interesting." Stross emphasized that the "Merchant Princes" stories are science fiction, not fantasy or magic.

Stirling addressed the claim of Clarke's Law ("Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic") by observing that it ignores the scientific method.

Stirling claimed that when you write about the Bronze Age, it is far enough back that you can make things up.

An audience member said he would like to see more points of divergence that are not based on politics or technology. (Even the religious points of divergence mentioned earlier came about from politics.)

Steven Silver claimed that all of Hitler's family has taken an oath not to have children so as to assure that there will be no collateral descendents for Nazis to rally around.

A World Made of Birds - What Would the Earth Be Like If the Dinosaurs Had Lived?
Friday, 11:30AM
David Coe, Robert Hole, Glenda Larke, Robert J. Sawyer (mod), Sam Scheiner

Description: "Speculation about life on earth would have developed without the mass extinction at the end of the Cretaceous Period."

Attendance: 60

[Between when this panel was held and when I am writing this, new evidence has surfaced that the birds are not descended directly from the dinosaurs, but rather that they share a close common ancestor. I will write this based on the knowledge at the time of the panel.]

Sawyer said that initially he wanted to be a dinosaur paleontologist, but instead he ended up writing books like the "Far-Seer" trilogy, *End of an Era*, and *Calculating God*. He suggested a world made of birds in which the dinosaurs lived. Hole said that if the dinosaurs had lived, we would not be here. The niches for larger mammals became available when the dinosaurs went extinct. Even if they had not, they might not have turned into anything intelligent. Larke agreed, but thought arboreal apes might have developed, since that niche was vacant. Coe disagreed, saying we can overestimate the value of brute strength and underestimate the value of intelligence.

Scheiner said that mammals were already diverse 65 million years ago, and dinosaurs were already on the way out (and getting smaller). And the evolution of the grasses and the diversification of fruit was still to come.

Sawyer asked about dinosaur and avian intelligence. Hole said that birds are as intelligent as young children with some language skills. But there were no humanoid dinosaurs. Larke said, "If birds were running science fiction conventions, the filking would be a lot better." (Well, with that name, she would think so, wouldn't she?) She also claimed that birds have a vestigal thumb.

Coe said that avian visual acuity is incredibly advanced. (I noticed at this point that all the panelists were wearing glasses.) Larke said they also had a strong sense of smell. On the other hand, Scheiner said that we have given up a lot of sensory aptitude that our ancestors had. Scheiner also said that corvids are amazingly intelligent, and make tools. Birds also have languages with different dialects.

Sawyer said that whether we had intelligent mammals or birds, "in both versions of reality, [science fiction writers] work for chicken feed." But seriously, reptilian brains are very different from mammalian brains. Birds and mammals have the same functional abilities, but what about self-awareness and so on? And birds have no hands with which to tame fire. Hole said that feet could be used (but I think Sawyer meant something more like birds' feet not being manipulative enough).

Someone in the audience suggested that our arboreal ancestors took advantage of fruit evolving.

Scheiner asked if flight in birds developed up from the ground or down from the trees (i.e., arboreal dinosaurs). He noted that arboreal dinosaurs would be small and hence hard to fossilize, so the lack of evidence is not surprising. (It does seem as though the evolution of fruit might require arboreals to help spread the seeds, pits, or whatever.)

Scheiner said that intelligence is driven by social interactions, and pointed out that crows and parrots live in flocks. Larke said that long adolescence in humans contributes to intelligence. Hole countered that some avian species live with their parents for years, leading Coe to say, "It takes a flock..."

Sawyer asked why, if all this was true, there is no second (avian) intelligent species. Hole suggested it was because one needs manipulative abilities and we got there first. (One might well argue that the cetaceans form a second intelligent species, but one which does not share an environment with us.)

Sawyer then asked why there was no second technological species--not at all the same question. Hole thought that more brain material was needed (or at least helps) than birds had. Flighted birds in particular go for smaller brains. An audience member asked about flightless birds. Scheiner said that overall it is easier to lose hands (e.g., have them reduce to wings or flippers) than to add them back, and Hole said it is also easier to lose brain material than to add it back. Someone in the audience said, however, that birds were missing entire brain regions, not because they lost them, but because they never had them.

An audience member said that humans need intelligence because we are not great at being carnivores and we are not great at being herbivores.

Someone asked about troödens and other lesser known dinosaurs, but no one answered this.

Sawyer said that in *End of an Era*, the dinosaurs did not have "existential thoughts," but needed intelligence for hunting.

Someone mentioned Harry Harrison's *West of Eden* as a classic "dinosaurs survive" story.

Someone asked what would happen if you took the smartest bird and genetically mutate it? Would it still be a bird?

Coe asked, "What about communal intelligence?" Larke said that birds depend more on inheritance of knowledge than on learning. (Is that rather Lamarckian? Is the claim that what a bird learns it can pass on to its offspring genetically?)

Scheiner asked what is unique about birds' abilities, and answered that it seems to be navigation and flight. Hole said that there are 9800 species of birds, meaning there may be more species of dinosaur descendents than of dinosaurs. And not all have these particular abilities.

Sawyer noted that while it is true that some birds can fly and some cannot, it is also true that some apes swim and some do not. And arboreal primates have great vision, while we do not. Someone observed that there are 4000 species of mammals and 1000 of those are bats. Sawyer said that these were mammals who reduced their brain size and added echo-location. They also have more manipulative ability than birds (probably because their wings developed from hands). In fact, the

closest relatives to primates are bats. (Hole describes bats as our first cousins.)

Scheiner said that there are really two separate groups of bats. In the New World, bats are insectivores and nocturnal. In the Old World, they are fruit-eating and diurnal. He also re-iterated the belief that two species exploiting the same niche cannot co-exist.

Coe pointed out that throughout all this, we seem to be assuming that evolution is a fait accompli, while it is actually on-going. Someone in the audience claimed that intelligence is evolving on different continents. (I am not sure what this meant.)

Someone else said that intelligence allows us to broaden our niche. Sawyer said that the whole idea of "the grass is greener over there" requires intelligence.

Hoe gave examples of groups occupying the same niche meeting and clashing to the detriment of one as the arrival of Europeans to the New World in 1492 and the arrival of Europeans to Australia in the 18th century. (But these were different cultures, not different species.) An audience member added Mauritius in 1721. (A better example might be the introduction of non-native species which occupied the same niches as native species.)

Sawyer concluded by saying that most animals do not fear the unknown, and that maybe our success is that we fear everything.

Levers in the Time Stream: The Most Change for the Least Effort
Friday, 2:30PM
Paul Cornell, Eric Flint, John Hemry (mod), John Scalzi

Description: "If you're going to change history, you don't want to start just anywhere. What are the crucial historical events that give time travel and alternate history authors the highest possibilities of change for the lowest input?"

Attendance: 60

[This panel was somewhat disrupted by the "Trailer Park" program item next door. Note to programmers: make sure "Trailer Park" and other presentations using loud sound are sufficiently isolated.]

The topic of the panel was summarized as "most bang for the buck."

Cornell began by asking, "How much is time like space?" "Time is quite hard to break," he said. He contended that stepping on a butterfly just kills the butterfly. To actually effect a real change needs "a very big thing." If you shoot Hitler in 1920, someone else will just come along to take his place. Clearly, Cornell subscribes to the "Tide of History" theory, but he also claims to believe in the "Great Man" theory in that he requires a replacement person for Hitler. I should note that these theories have been politicized over the years, and that a combination of the two is probably the most reasonable approach.

Scalzi thought that the "Great Man" theory is "awfully convenient." His view of history was that history creates cusps.

Cornell suggested that all this was very similar to the "waves or particles" dichotomy. Hemry said this in turn might like to "quantum history."

Flint started by saying that said he consciously tries to avoid points of divergence based in the American Civil War or World War II. As for the theories, he said that "trying to deny [great forces of history at work] is just silly." His "1632" series, for example, could not be "132'--the basics are not in

place. But "within that [framework], individuals make a difference." He somewhat disputed Cornell's contention regarding Hitler, saying that while World War II would still have happened, the Holocaust might not (probably would not?) have happened. Flint also said, "Writing nautical fiction automatically biases the writer towards the 'Great Man' theory of history."

Hemry said, "History has a great deal of inertia." It also has a great deal of ambiguity. "What if the Mongols had conquered China?" But of course, they did. "What if the Mongols had conquered Europe?" Maybe nothing. He did suggest that introducing European diseases into America earlier--much earlier--might have made a difference.

Hemry thought one important cusp in American history was Washington yielding power over the Army, and later refusing to stay on as President after two terms.

Scalzi said one approach to history might be to treat events as a disease, so you would think of curing Hitler, or of going back further and treating the causes of these diseases. (Let me put in a plug for the movie *Max*, not alternate history, but feeling *very* much like it.) Scalzi said the only problem is that all this is not good drama.

Flint said that his *Rivers of War* was like that, and was very hard to sell. (It sounds like Stephen Baxter's "Time's Tapestry" series as well.)

Hemry asked if the panel was talking about levers that are believed or ones that are realistic. Scalzi said the problem was general ignorance in the readers. Neal Stephenson, he said, bucks the tide with his very complex novels and series based on obscure and arcane history. (I suspect Mary Gentle does as well.)

Cornell said that something to remember was that geography creates the forces of history.

Flint said that S. M. Stirling's *Peshwar Lancers* assumes the absence of Victorian England as a lever.

Hemry asked whether the lever should be religion, technology, or politics. Flint said it really depends on what you want to focus on. Cornell thought that technology trumps both politics and religion, but Flint said that for the Chinese politics trumped technology (as in the abandonment of their exploratory fleet in the 15the century). (I would add that this is true for the Japanese as well, who abandoned firearms for several hundred years.)

Scalzi thought all three were equally influential. Also, the same lever can have different results: "Henry VIII was not the Protestant Reformation."

Hemry asked if we could predict results. Scalzi said no, because we cannot even predict the "real" future.

Cornell asked asked, "What if time is robust?" Scalzi asked, "What are you, a Calvinist?" and Cornell replied, "Actually, yes."

Flint pointed out that in the technological area, for example, firearms preclude nomadic invasions. Scalzi said that you will get a variety of results within a range of possibilities.

Scalzi said that some of the questions to be asked are whether we are moving toward authoritarianism, whether democracy is inevitable, and so on. Cornell wondered whether nuclear war is a strange attractor we have avoided or the opposite. Scalzi said, "I think the strange attractor is technology."

Cornell suggested that fiction, such as George Orwell's *1984* or Nevil Shute's *On the Beach*, might be a sort of inoculation.

Someone in the audience asked, "Even if you change everything, do you change anything?" In Harry Turtledove's massive multi-connected-series, is anything really different?

Fred Lerner suggested that a meteor hitting Carpenters Hall during the Constitutional Convention might made a big difference. Scalzi disagreed, saying that eventually there would by little or no change unless other events were added.

Flint said that the classic L. Sprague de Camp's *Lest Darkness Fall* relied on technology, which in turn drove the political and military ones. But in that book, someone twenty years later wrote a three-volume history which demonstrated that all the technology was unimportant.

Henry thought that the effects are often more interesting than the cause, and gave Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee* as an example. Someone in the audience said that one problem was that twenty years after the Civil War is too short a time, but Scalzi said no, changes do happen fast.

Hemry said one factor is that "ultimately, we all want to think we matter."

Someone in the audience claimed, "All history is fiction." Hemry replied, "No argument," but Scalzi said, "Yes, argument." Scalzi said there are political agendae and perspectives that affect one's view, but that facts will out ("assuming the evidence hangs around"). Henry said that popular history does not reflect historical fact, and "the level of what is considered truth is a lot fuzzier than people think."

Asked about time travel, Hemry said that until we have a mechanism, no evidence of time travel is sufficient. (Consider the Kennewick Man. Some might consider it evidence of time travel, but others have presented various scenarios to explain it without resorting to time travel.)

Flint referred back to an earlier topic, saying, "Arguing Mongol hordes made no difference is really dicey." Scalzi said, "Movements that describe themselves as historic inevitabilities are doomed to ultimate irrelevancy." Flint noted that the time between Louis XIV and the American Revolution is the same as the time from the Russian Revolution to now. In the former time period, it was "obvious" that monarchy was "it".

At one point, the panelists had discussed that most ideas would not sell, and that seemed to limit their speculations. However, the panel does not have to sell their comments, so they could have been more wide-ranging. Of course, as Scalzi said, "Our neural pathways are laid down to what we can sell." And he also noted, "No panel description survives contact with its panelists."

More Leather than Books: the Generation of the Huckster Room at Science Fiction Conventions
Friday, 4:00PM
Marty Massoglia, Michael J. Walsh

Description: "Early convention dealers rooms were mostly filled with books. These days, with used books indexed by price on the internet, the convention dealers room features gewgaws, models, jewelry, paintings, clothing, and leather - as well as books. Experienced dealers and con runners discuss the development of the dealers room over the last decades."

Attendance: 10

(Massoglia has a store in the Los Angeles area, and said that in the Northridge earthquake, the religion section was untouched, even though everything else was on the floor.)

Walsh said that he started selling at Worldcon 1974; Massoglia started in 1977 (though he had helped others as early as 1969). He deals in comics, pulps, and magazines, as well as books.

Walsh said there has been a decrease in digest sales, though Massoglia thinks they are making a comeback. Walsh said that at Confluence David Hartwell was selling old magazines to a thirteen-year-old, which he took as a good sign.

Walsh asked, "When did it all change?" Massoglia said it was the same time the masquerade changed (1967, and again in 1977). Massoglia said that 1967 was the start of media art and costumes. Before that, all the dealers sold books. Now he is the only used book dealer at conventions in the Southwest. Walsh said that in the Northeast, conventions work to try to get a balanced dealers room. Massoglia said that in the Arizona the problem is that they cannot find another willing dealer, and there are no new book dealers in the dealers room at all. Someone in the audience said that it was the same in Seattle.

Walsh described the 2002 Westercon as characterized by a "sheer lack of books," when compared to East Coast conventions.

I noted that one issue these days is the cost of transportation (gasoline), and the fact that distances often mean people are flying and do not have a lot of room in their luggage for purchases. (Maybe more conventions should arrange shipping offices.)

Massoglia pointed out that the West Coast is much more spread out than the East, and too spread out for any dealer to do very many conventions. While a dealer in the New York area has three conventions in Boston, one in New York, one in Philadelphia, and a couple in the Baltimore-DC area, all within a couple of hundred miles, a dealer in Los Angeles has to drive 400 miles to get to San Francisco or Phoenix, 800 to Albuquerque, 1000 to get to Denver, and 1100 to get to Seattle.

Sidewise Awards
Friday, 5:30PM

This was in the main hotel, a long walk from the convention (especially at this altitude). While we waited for everyone to arrive, someone asked what constituted *bad* alternate history. One person said one in which the Nazis win, but Michael Flynn said it was one in which "you don't get paid." Kristine Kathryn Rusch said it was any one in which the author displayed a lack of knowledge. John Strickland said it was when things are too similar.

Pubbing Your Ish: Making Fanzines Happen
Saturday, 11:30AM
Evelyn Leeper (mod), Guy Lillian, Joseph Major, Jeanne Mealy, Suzanne Tompkins

Description: "The perils and pitfalls of fanzine publishing and how to overcome them!"

Attendance: 30

[This is yet another panel where being on it (and moderating it!) made it hard to take notes. It is not helping that I am writing this a year later!]

Mealy is in 5 APAs and uses a manual typewriter.

People talked about the cost of producing a paper fanzine. Kinko's charges nine cents a page, so an average fanzine issue would cost $10 for duplication costs (that's about 111 pages). My note says that doing it at home is cheaper, but a cartridge costs $80 for 20 copies. That sounds wrong. If a "copy" is one whole issue, then $4 an issue might be right, I suppose, but are most fanzines really 111 pages long?

Major said that the "Alexiad" costs $100 per issue of 70 copies, plus $60-$70 postage. (I am *so* glad we do the "MT VOID" electronically!)

Someone said the advantage of a paper fanzine is that you can take it into the bathroom, leading someone else to add helpfully that if you do, mimeo paper is softer. Actually, they seem unfamiliar with netbooks and palmtops, if they think electronic fanzines cannot be taken into the bathroom.

It was fanzines, in particular the Southern Fandom Press Alliance, that started southern fandom. SFPA #100 was 1010 pages long and weighed 10 pounds.

Many fanzines were mentioned. efanzines.com is a way to find a lot of electronic fanzines.

20 Essential SF Books of the Past 20 Years
Saturday, 2:30PM
Charles Brown, Karen Burnham, Cheryl Morgan (mod), Graham Sleight, Gary Wolfe

Description: "Our panelists share their opinions and make recommendations."

Attendance: 100

Even before writing this up, my guess is that the list will be longer than 20 (books) times 4 (panelists), or 80. Books will get added, but no old ones deleted.

Morgan said that each word in "twenty essential SF books" generates controversy. (I suppose even "of the past twenty years" might as well--does January through July of 1988 count?)

Burnham said that her approach was to ask, if someone had been kidnapped in a cave in 1988 and just released, what should they read to catch up with? Wolfe said that he stuck to novels (no anthologies or collections), and each book had to *represent* something. Sleight looked upon this as "Desert Island Discs" with books. Just as most "Desert Island Books" discussions disallow the Bible and Shakespeare, he disallows John Clute and Peter Nicholls's *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. Brown said he was looking for books that said something startling and affected the field. He said this was somewhat flexible: "I could come up with ten; I could come up with fifty." Morgan said she was looking for books that were/are "emblematic".

A lot of the panel was a sort of "round-robin" listing of books. I will consolidate the lists by panelists, but will retain the order.

Wolfe:

- *Crescent City Rhapsody* by Kathleen Ann Goonan
- *Light* by M. John Harrison
- *Parable of the Sower* by Octavia Butler (point of view of the disenfranchised)
- *Faeryland* by Paul McAuley
- *Counting Heads* by David Marusek
- *The Gate to Women's Country* by Sheri Tepper (which he said would be fun if you could have it for a week)
- *Snowcrash* by Neal Stephenson
- *The Separation* by Christopher Priest
- *The Difference Engine* by William Gibson and Bruce Sterling
- "Furious Gulf" (a.k.a. "Galactic Center") series by Gregory Benford

(At one point Wolfe said he had a lot of overlap, which probably would account for the missing ten books.)

Sleight:

- *Light* by M. John Harrison

- *The Child Garden* by Geoff Ryman
- "Mars" series by Kim Stanley Robinson
- *Stories of Your Life and Others* by Ted Chiang
- *River of Gods* by Ian MacDonald
- *Against the Day* by Thomas Pynchon
- *Good News from Outer Space* by John Kessel (this was bracketed in my notes for some reason, but seems to have been counted in the twenty)
- *Slimmering* by Elizabeth Hand
- *Virtual Light* by William Gibson
- *Idoru* by William Gibson
- *All Tomorrow's Parties* by William Gibson
- *Use of Weapons* by Iain M. Banks
- *Sarah Canary* by Karen Joy Fowler
- *The M. D.* by Thomas Disch
- *Hyperion/Fall of Hyperion* by Dan Simmons
- *Distraction* by Bruce Sterling
- *The Sparrow* by Mary Doria Russell
- *A Fire Upon the Deep* by Vernor Vinge
- *Beggars in Spain* by Nancy Kress
- *China Mountain Zhang* by Maureen McHugh

Burnham:

- *Faeryland* by Paul McAuley
- "Mars" series by Kim Stanley Robinson
- *River of Gods* by Ian MacDonald
- *Stories of Your Life and Others* by Ted Chiang
- *Pump 6 and Other Stories* by Paolo Bacigalupi
- *Magic for Beginners* by Kelly Link
- *SFWA European Hall of Fame* edited by James Morrow and Kathryn Morrow
- *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* by Haruki Murakami
- *Air, or Have Not Have* by Geoff Ryman
- "Capitol Science" series by Kim Stanley Robinson
- "Pandora's Star" duology by Peter Hamilton (which I think is further broken up in the United States)
- "Revelation Space" series by Alastair Reynolds
- *Coyote Kings of the Space-Age Bachelor Pad* by Minister Faust
- "Boing Boing" by Cory Doctorow (the blog)
- *The Matrix* (the movie)
- *Altered Carbon* by Richard Morgan

(The remaining four books may have been accounted for my counting individual books in a series.)

Brown:

- *Faeryland* by Paul McAuley
- *River of Gods* by Ian MacDonald
- *Queen City Jazz* by Kathleen Ann Goonan
- *Antarctica* by Kim Stanley Robinson
- *Holy Fire* by Bruce Sterling
- *Evolution* by Stephen Baxter (Stapledonian)
- *Accelerando* by Charles Stross
- *Diaspora* by Greg Egan
- *Pattern Recognition* by William Gibson
- *Grass* by Sheri Tepper (did not preach as much as *The Gate to Women's Country*)

- *Spin* by Robert Charles Wilson
- *Axis* by Robert Charles Wilson
- "Queen of Angels" series by Greg Bear
- *Mother of Storms* by John Barnes
- *Cryptonomicon* by Neal Stephenson

(The five remaining books may have been unlisted overlap.)

Morgan:

- Kathleen Ann Goonan series
- *River of Gods* by Ian MacDonald
- *Air, or Have Not Have* by Geoff Ryman
- *Perdido Street Station* by China Miéville (The New Weird)
- "Revolution" series by Ken MacLeod (*The Stone Canal* in particular)
- *The Furies* by Suzy McKee Charnas
- *Conqueror's Child* by Suzy McKee Charnas
- *Soldier of Arete* by Gene Wolfe
- *Cloud Atlas* by David Mitchell
- *Revelation Space* by Alastair Reynolds
- "Aleutian" trilogy by Gwyneth Jones
- *Synners* by Pat Cadigan
- *The Diamond Age* by Neal Stephenson
- *The Course of the Heart* by M. John Harrison and David Lloyd
- *Waking the Moon* by Elizabeth Hand (the United States edition, which is shorter than the British)
- *Rats and Gargoyles* by Mary Gentle
- "Arabesque" trilogy by Jon Courtney Grimwood
- *The Fortunate Fall* by Raphael Carter
- "Sandman Books of Magic" by Neil Gaiman
- *Infinite Worlds* by Vincent DiFate

Sleight said that these lists showed that "one can no longer consider SF as one unary conversation--if indeed we ever could." I do think that a set of 20/20 lists compiled in 1968 would have much more overlap.

I think that *Coyote Kings of the Space-Age Bachelor Pad* was what led Brown to say, "I don't mind wonderful writing, but I need ideas." He also said that Hamilton "can't write his way out of a paper bag", Robinson's "Capitol Science" has too much agenda, and Miéville is overrated at novel length.

Wolfe disagreed with Brown, saying that one can read for different reasons. One can look for new ideas, or one can look for people who do the old ideas better.

Sleight thought the lists were biased towards "our earliest intersection with the period." It took me a moment to realize that not everyone was old enough to have been reading SF through that entire time.

The Return of the Dirigible
Saturday, 5:30PM
Linda Donahue, Richard Foss, David Friedman (mod), Linda Robinett

Description: "Will rising oil prices bring back floating palaces?"

Attendance: 50

Friedman said that the first question to ask was whether it took more or less energy for a dirigible.

Foss later said that there was a dirigible, "Helios", that was solar-powered.

Donahue said that there were dirigible stories in Martin H. Greenberg's *Future America*, and Friedman said there were some in Greenberg's *Future Imperfect*.

Foss said he knew of failed attempts at commercial dirigible service. The panel was not really considering tourism ventures such as "fly over Las Vegas in a dirigible for an hour," and indeed Robinett said we needed to distinguish between military and luxury uses as well.

Foss thought some definitions were in order. A zeppelin (which term the panel used interchangeably with dirigible) is an airship with a rigid frame. A blimp has no frame, so is lighter. They have different modes of failure.

Friedman said that there are factors of speed, cross-section, and supply weight for the length of time they are in the air that need to be considered. Robinett said that their forte was not speed, but they were move like the "Queen Elizabth 2 of the air."

Foss thought that they could replace helicopters in search and rescue, or in heavy lifting. Donahue said this also meant they could replace trucking for large per-ton-cost items. Someone in the audience suggested they would be useful for transportation to smaller airports, or those with shorter runways.

Robinett thought they could replace satellites for long-term surveillance.

Foss said that one problem is that helium is expensive, but hydrogen has a bad reputation, mostly unwarranted. According to Foss (and "Mythbusters", if I remember correctly), it was the dope in the fabric that was the real problem. Someone suggested a double-hull design, with nitrogen around hydrogen. Someone else suggested using hydrogen two ways, both for lift and as fuel.

Robinett said the other major dirigible disaster, the Shenandoah, was a military stunt attempted in bad weather.

Foss said that it is possible to cruise at speeds around 150 miles per hour, but Donahue said that one problem is that you cannot select your altitude based on transient weather conditions.

Foss said there were two British dirigible projects, the R100 and the R101, on capitalist and one socialist. Someone in the audience said that Nevil Shute worked on both of them.

The real problem, according to Foss, is undercapitalization. I asked about using dirigibles for such routes as inter-island hops in Hawai'i. Foss said that Molokai and Lanai are often too windy for dirigibles. However, oil companies that require lifting to remote areas without airfields, or roads, or (in the case of deep-sea oil rigs) even land. There will be a place for the luxury dirigibles, Foss said, but in something paralleling the cruise market rather than the transportation market. Someone thought businesses might use them for conferences. Foss said all this could lead to posters saying, "Cruise Nebraska".

Someone observed that historically the zeppelin was fast, with fine dining, but still provided basic bunk beds rather than luxury cabins.

Donohue mused that bungee jumping from dirigibles might be popular.

Someone asked about motion sickness. Donahue said it depended on how the gondola was attached. Someone else claimed that the Hindenberg was the first (air?) vehicle that the Roman Catholic Church allowed Mass to be said on because it was the first that was stable enough (that the wine would not spill). (I assume Mass had been said on large transatlantic liners.) De-icing is a concern, however.

Hugo Awards Ceremony
Saturday, 7:30PM

Description: "You voted (you did vote, right?) now see the results at the prestigious 2008 Hugo Awards ceremony! Toastmaster Wil McCarthy will host; among the presenters will be Artist GoH Rick Sternbach, Fan GoH Tom Whitmore, past Hugo winners Connie Willis and Robert Silverberg, Nebula winner Ed Bryant, and longtime fan Rusty Hevelin. There will also be a short performance by Special Music Guest Kathy Mar."

Before the ceremony, they flashed a slide show on the screen, which included a picture of Mark reading something on his palmtop with the Vertical Reader software.

Someone wished "good luck to all the nominees," which is a bit of a mathematical absurdity. (Yes, there could be a five-way tie, but how likely is that?)

And the winners were:

- Best Novel: *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* by Michael Chabon (HarperCollins; Fourth Estate)
- Best Novella: "All Seated on the Ground" by Connie Willis (Asimov's Dec. 2007; Subterranean Press)
- Best Novelette: "The Merchant and the Alchemist's Gate" by Ted Chiang (Subterranean Press; F&SF Sept. 2007)
- Best Short Story: "Tideline" by Elizabeth Bear (Asimov's June 2007)
- Best Related Book: *Brave New Words: The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction* by Jeff Prucher (Oxford University Press)
- Best Dramatic Presentation, Long Form: *Stardust* Written by Jane Goldman and Matthew Vaughn, Based on the novel by Neil Gaiman Illustrated by Charles Vess Directed by Matthew Vaughn (Paramount Pictures)
- Best Dramatic Presentation, Short Form: *Doctor Who* "Blink" Written by Steven Moffat Directed by Hettie Macdonald (BBC)
- Best Editor, Long Form: David G. Hartwell
- Best Editor, Short Form: Gordon Van Gelder
- Best Professional Artist: Stephan Martiniere
- Best Semiprozine: *Locus*
- Best Fanzine: *File 770*
- Best Fan Writer: John Scalzi
- Best Fan Artist: Brad Foster
- John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer: Mary Robinette Kowal

De revolutione scientiarum
Sunday, 10:00AM
Michael Flynn, Walter Hunt (mod), John Maddox Roberts, Steven Silver

Description: "Could the scientific revolution have happened three centuries sooner? What are the medieval roots of science? Why did it not happen sooner? What might have put it off until the 20th century?"

Attendance: 140

Hunt said that Flynn's *In the Country of the Blind* deals with this topic somewhat. The panelists gave their backgrounds: Silver has an M.A. in Medieval History; Roberts has a B.A. in English. (Roberts writes novels set in ancient Rome, but has difficulty pronouncing Latin.)

[I have a note that says, "Flynn saw ASA and thought, 'I've died and gone to heaven. Which shall I attend?'" I wish I knew what it meant.]

Flynn mentioned his novel *Eifelheim* and recommended Edward Grant's *Foundations of Science in the Middle Ages* and Toby Huff's *The Rise of Early Modern Science*. Why was there no scientific revolution in the Middle Ages? Well, Flynn said his "Quaestiones Supra Caelo et Mundo" posits one.

Hunt said that a scientific background for a milieu requires knowledge of impacts. Flynn said that we do not have to imagine it, we can look at the world. For example, automobiles changed mating habits, and couples started spending time at drive-ins rather than on front porches.

Silver suggested James Burke's *Connections* as a good analysis of causes and effects, and said that authors should use 20-20 hindsight. Hunt said that one modern example of unexpected consequences was how much Hawai'i changed with cheap airfares.

Flynn claimed that Genesis 1:1-2 ("In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.") created science. (But the Chinese had science without it.)

Flynn said that people have been confusing advances in technology with science since the middle of the 19th century. Until then, technology ran ahead of science, Silver noted that in "Quaestiones Supra Caelo et Mundo" Flynn does in fact show the scientific process, not technology.

David Lindberg's book *The Beginnings of Western Science: The European Scientific Tradition in Philosophical, Religious, and Institutional Context, Prehistory to A.D. 1450* gives nine definitions of science. "Scientia" actually means "knowledge". Aristotle wrote about physics, mathematics, and metaphysics. Flynn describes physics as dealing with the abstractive properties of real objects, and mathematics as dealing with ideal objects. But something like gravity, he said, is metaphysical. And fact leads to mathematical law, which in turn leads to physical theory.

Roberts said that Plato was "an absolute disaster for Greek science." For example, Plato announced, "Philosophers should not try to manipulate matter"; it would make them too much life craftsmen. But Roberts went on, "It was worse than that. Reality was the mathematics. The real world was only an approximation." And all Greek mathematics was static (i.e., there was no calculus). (Someone in the audience later mentioned the Archimedes palimpsest which seemed to indicate that he had discovered calculus.)

Silver observed that North Africa and China had scientific revolutions before Europe. Flynn said that until the 10th century there was no Muslim spread. What was taught was Greek science (also called "foreign science" or "foreign knowledge"), which was taught in the Greek method, not a self-governing guild. Then you had the rise of colleges and universities with a set curriculum, degrees of advancement, self-government, and so on. The curriculum had Aristotle, Galen, and various Arabs. It was almost exclusively the natural sciences--there was no history, art, or literature. And one had to pass this to become a theologian.

Someone asked why there was a common curriculum across all of Europe. Silver said it was created in the 11th and 12th centuries out of cathedral schools, which were already somewhat standardized. There was also movement between schools, with learning by transcription. Also, the quadrivium and trivium was well-accepted at this point. Roberts observed that they had a common language (Latin) which united all the schools. Silver agreed, noting that "literacy" meant you could read and write Latin, not the vernacular.

Flynn talked about Nicholas Oresne, who invented the plus sign, and proved the mean speed theory using Euclidean geometry. He also wrote in the vernacular (in his case, French), and discussed the possibility of a moving Earth--all in the mid-1300s.

Flynn said that the trick in supposing any alternate history, scientific or otherwise, is that you have to examine events with an open mind: "You have to look at the Battle of Salamis as if the Persians might

win."

An audience member recommended Jane Jacobs's *Systems of Survival: A Dialogue on the Moral Foundations of Commerce and Politics*, which looks at the opposition between the warrior aristocracy and the merchants.

Flynn returned to Archimedes, admitting that "[he] came close to integral calculus. If he was creeping up on the differential calculus, then good for him." Hunt noted that Archimedes was not entirely a minor character. Flynn asked, if there was an Archimedean calculus, why was there no development of it? Well, the medievals concentrated on Latin literature, while ignoring Greek literature. There was also a lack of good mathematical notation, and finally, the medievals were busy fighting the Vikings, the Magyars, the Saracens, ...

Someone in the audience mentioned the "Antikitheran device" and the idea of a single reality versus individual realities. Flynn seemed to think that one reason science did not arise in India was that there was a stronger concept of individual realities there. Aristotle was really the only empiricist at the time. Nature consisted of substance and form, efficient and final causes, he said, and the nature of a thing could be affected by the observer. True, Flynn said, but he did not take into account the effect of scale.

Flynn summarize Peter Deere's *Six Pillars of the Scientific Revolution*:

- A view of the world as machine
- A distinction between primary and secondary qualities
- The use of deliberate and recorded experiments
- The use of mathematics as a privileged tool
- The pursuit of natural philosophy as an enterprise
- Science as a profession

Various people pointed out that the Romans closed the Greek schools, and there was lack of funding for science. Also, the Ionians (e.g., Thales, Pythagoras) were more hands-on than other Greeks.

Flynn noted that astronomy and music started out as branches of mathematics. But the Greeks saw things as binary (e.g., either hot or cold) rather than a continuum (e.g., temperature measured on a scale). It was Duns Scotus who developed the idea of a continuum around 1300. There was a lot of discussion of "intention or remission of forms" and "beginnings and ends") (e.g., when does blue become green?).

Silver asked more specifically whether one could have a scientific revolution without the observation->mathematics->theory ladder paradigm.

Someone mentioned Barbara Tuchman's *A Distant Mirror* and Neal Stephenson's "Baroque Cycle".

Flynn said, "Political stability I don't think is a requirement for natural science."

Asked about the place of the concept of intellectual property, Flynn replied, "But, again, that's technology."

Roberts asked whether one could have had the scientific revolution during Charlemagne's time. Flynn said to have the scientific revolution you needed Aristotle, and you needed Aquinas. Aquinas reconciled science and theology. In the Arab world, you did not have this: al-Gizari said that fire does not burn the cloth, but that Allah creates fire, ash, flame, etc., all at the same time. The response to the incoherence of philosophy is the incoherence of incoherence.

Silver summarized that you need a lot of changes before the scientific revolution, and if you postulate

them for a story, the 14th century becomes unrecognizable. Hunt suggested a trope where magic worked in the past, but the scientific revolution destroyed it. Silver said this was the case in J. Gregory Keyes's "Age of Unreason" series.

[It is almost like a "Schroedinger's magic", which may work but observing it may collapse it to a form that does not.]

Flynn re-iterated the reticence to handle "stuff." Until the scientific revolution, the alchemists were the only ones doing so. He noted that the first autopsy was in 1301, but Roberts pointed out that while they had a lot of restrictions on autopsies, "Romans had very few limits on what you could do to a *live* body."

How Will the Future Remember the 20th Century?
Sunday, 11:00AM
Nancy Kress, James Morrow, Harry Turtledove (mod)

Description: "People remember Greek philosophers, Roman roads, and Renaissance painters. What will humans a thousand years from now remember about the 20th century?"

Attendance: 60

Turtledove proposed a thought experiment (which he called a gedanken experiment, but I thought I should translate): what do we think of when we think about the tenth century? The answer seemed to be Vikings and the Maoris in New Zealand, though I suspect very few non-"ANZACs" would think of the latter. Kress noted wryly, "We're five minutes into the panel and I'm already in the wrong century"--she first thought of 1066, which is of course the *eleventh* century. Turtledove said that she pretty much demonstrated his point--we either do not remember anything, or get the wrong century.

Kress said that politics fades faster than other stuff, although we remember larger movements. She suggested what we would remember from the 20th century would be science.

Morrow thought this was a terrific topic, saying, "It was the best of centuries, it was the worst of centuries...." He said it would be remembered as a century in which "we saw the last gasp of total over-arching, mind-numbing truths" and ideologies. Turtledove saw it as an argument between Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Voltaire, and that we "went into it as a group of separate civilizations, and came out of it largely homogenized." (Indeed, one may see the Islamicists as being the last gasp of resistance to this homogenization.) Someone in the audience nicknamed it "The Century of the Blender".

Kress disagreed strongly, and Morrow added that it was certainly not the "Century of Justice". But in terms of homogenization, Morrow quoted Kurt Vonnegut, who said science fiction is the only literature that makes us think of ourselves as "members of a species and citizens of a planet."

Kress said that when talking about this century, she did not want to rule out things not based on science or reason. Morrow responded, "Almost everyone has invisible friends and I don't want to take them away." Kress took offense at this, saying, "You just want to ridicule them into non-existence." "Science is a big part of the truth," she said, "but not the whole truth." Morrow mentioned Arthur C. Clarke's *The City and the Stars* and Jacob Bronowski's "retreat from knowledge":

> "And I am infinitely saddened to find myself suddenly surrounded in the west by a sense of terrible loss of nerve, a retreat from knowledge into ... into what? Into Zen Buddhism; into falsely profound questions about, 'Are we not really just animals at bottom?'; into extra-sensory perception and mystery. They do not lie along the line of what we are able to know if we devote ourselves to it: an understanding of man himself. We are nature's unique experiment to make the rational intelligence prove itself sounder than the reflex.

> Knowledge is our destiny. Self-knowledge, at last bringing together the experience of the arts and the explanations of science, waits ahead of us." [Episode 13: "The Long Childhood"]

Mark Leeper mentioned that this was the century when violent deaths per thousand exceeded poverty/disease deaths per thousand.

Turtledove addressed the science (technology) aspect by saying, "The Singularity strikes me as a high-tech version of the Rapture and I don't buy it." Kress thought that we could have some advances, but also some declines. Morrow described the century as also being the "Great Experiment in Secularism" that failed, because science alone is not enough. Kress pointed to Stephen Jay Gould's book *Rocks of Ages* as pertinent to this, but Morrow thought it a "dreadful book."

Turtledove said that the medieval scholar al-Gizali thought that science and religion are incompatible, and that studying science leads to a loss of faith, but that Thomas Aquinas said that they *were* compatible.

Kress said that she was not necessarily talking about God, or religion, but that there were other forms of faith or spirituality. Even Buddhism or Taoism may be too codified, but Western religions and these are not all there is. Morrow was adamant that he did not want to cede morals and ethics to religion. (Neither seemed to consider the notion that the other realm that Kress was arguing for *was* morals or ethics.)

Turtledove pointed out that everyone sees the past as leading to them, so the 30th century will think that the 20th century led to them, no matter what they are like. Morrow referred to this century as perhaps being a "homogeny of pluralism." Kress insisted that this homogeny was illusionary, that worldviews *do* differ. For example, the West focuses on individuality, but the Arab world has much less emphasis on this. Turtledove suggested that this is changing. He also suggested that one big change was that racism and sexism "no longer have traction." (Whether this is true in all cultures is unclear to me, and in any case, new modes of prejudice will undoubtedly arise to take their place; see Frederik Pohl's "The Day the Martians Came".)

Someone again mentioned science (and knowledge). (I wonder, though, if they will attach this to the 20th century. Or whether we are just the precursor to a huge explosion of knowledge in the 21st century, just as we think of the science of the 19th century as leading to the 20th.) Morrow noted that "all insight is provisional" and "the map is not the territory."

Kress thought the 20th century would be seen as the beginning of space travel and genetic manipulation, medicines, computers, atomic energy, etc. She also suggested that the people of the 30th century would misread the records, much as the aliens did in *Galaxy Quest*, or the archaeologists in *Motel of the Mysteries*.

Morrow thought it a bit incorrect to see the 20th century as the century of science, saying that the 17th century saw the arrival of the experiment. Kress reminded people that science was not the same as technology. Morrow said, "The Enlightenment came along just when it was needed. The Renaissance had gone completely amuck."

Kress also noted that however much progress we made, our genetic drives are still primitive. She recommended *The Mating Mind* by Jeffrey Muller, which suggests that art, science, and mathematics are all forms of sexual attraction, just like the peacock's tail.

Switching to the realm of morals and ethics, Morrow said that who you are and how to lead a good life are not questions addressed by science. Turtledove said that unfortunately in this area secular authorities have done an even worse job than religion. "Some underpinning deeper than self-interest is needed." The problem, Turtledove suggested, is that "we are dogmatotropic. Dogmas let [people]

think without thinking." Kress added that there can be atheist dogmas as well, and Morrow observed, "[Richard] Dawkins is not the best advertisement for atheism."

Someone in the audience suggested, "Civilization increases the number of things we can do without thinking about them." (Or is that just technology?)

Another person suggested that this was the "Century of Acceleration", but Turtledove suggested that that term applies since the Scientific Revolution, especially since the 19th century. "Historical fiction is based on the concept that the past is different enough to be interesting," he said. L. Sprague deCamp's "Memoirs of a Time Traveler" becomes just reminiscences.

An audience member suggested (rather optimistically, I think) that the people most remembered from the 20th century would be Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Sitting in all these panels, I wonder if we will be remembered as the century that invented those godawful cell phones?]

"Rocket Talk" with Fizz and Fuse the Reactor Brothers
Sunday, 1:00PM
Bill Higgins ("Fuse"), Jordin Kare ("Fizz")

I am not sure what I was expecting, but this was less panel and more performance patterned after "The Car Guys", and I left after a couple of one-liners:

"Does my O-4 Betelgeuse require enriched uranium, or is regular uranium sufficient?"

"It's very difficult to get a Pluto ramjet to be street-legal."

Miscellaneous

Walking around the con, it was clear that "bald" was in.

Whenever something I really like does not win at the Hugos, I remind myself that even Sophocles' "Oedipus Rex" came in second in the competition it was written for.

Someone needs to do a photo essay on "The Photo Vests of Fandom"--they are becoming ubiquitous.

Panel suggestion: "The SF Novel as Travelogue" (e.g, Herbert Rosendorfer's *Letters Back to Ancient China*)

The Green Room had a clock and reasonable food and beverages, but did not open until 10AM (a problem for people on 10AM panels). The standard Convention Center recycling signs were very complicated, so I suggested that they post signs which listed just the items in use in the green room (forks, cups, plates, etc.) and which bin they went in, and they did this.

The altitude was a bit of a problem, particularly going between the hotels and the Convention Center.

Mark reported that the origami session was not as well organized as at other conventions.

The Masquerade ran on time. Interestingly, the novice costumes were often better than the Journeyman or Master Class ones. The camera crew, however, was not very good at centering the costumers, and the colors on the screen were wrong (e.g., purple-black showed up as bright blue).

Rooms in which there are movies, "trailer parks", and other louder items need to be acoustically

isolated from rooms with ordinary panels.