

## Two reviews of The World Science Fiction Convention

# Science fiction writers & fans let it hang out in Los Angeles

MITCHELL HARDING

Harlan Ellison, science fiction writer and force of nature, said he would give 100 SF Fans for one reader. There were over 2,000 fans there at the International Hotel, a 13 story chrome monument hard against LA International Airport over Labor Day weekend. Most of them were young, white, middle class and male. The occasion was the 30th World Science Fiction Convention put on by fans for other fans. Writers and artists in the field — and of course a few of Harlan's readers.

Why so few women? "I like women. I think they're great people," says Poul Anderson, one of the major SF writers who attended the LACON. He went on to explain, "The origins of magazine science fiction, that is to say, the science fiction of H. G. Wells, certainly did not treat women as objects, but then for a very long time science fiction was in the pulp magazine ghetto and observed the pulp conventions in which heroes were heroic and women were only there for the purpose of being rescued from villains etc., etc."

"Also for a long time science fiction was a remarkably puritanical field. At most the hero and heroine at the end of harrowing adventures might exchange a chaste kiss. Furthermore science fiction, let's say until 15 years ago, had an almost exclusively male audience anyway and tended to deal with situations where it would seem natural (sic) that only males would be involved, in exploring remote planets, etc. After all, this is traditionally what males have done while females stayed home, and science fiction reflected this."

"But increasingly now, in science fiction, as we become increasingly sophisticated, we get increasing numbers of females who have a crucial role to play in the story. For that matter we are getting many female writers, including extremely important new ones. For example Ursula LeGuin is one of the best writers by any standards that science fiction has got right now. Anne McCaffery is a woman writer who is not shy about using female characters. It's just a matter of the field growing up a little more."

It all began a long time ago. Some say science fiction began with Cyrano de Bergerac's voyage to the sun, or even before. Others mention H. G. Wells and (decreasingly these days) Jules Verne. Hugo Gernsback began the first wholly science fiction magazine in the 1920's and, perhaps more importantly from the viewpoint of the fans, began the first science fiction fan organization.

Poul Anderson has his classic list which begins with stories such as *As Easy As ABC* by Rudyard Kipling; *Krakatit* by Karel Capek, the man who invented the word "robot"; Wells' *The Time Machine*; and *The Long Journey* by Johannes Jenssen.

For five days the talk surged through the hotel. There were symposia (*The History of Science Fiction Fandom*, *Patterns of the Future*, *The Relevance of Science Fiction To Society*), there were speeches (*Where Science Fiction Is*, *Professionalism in Science Fiction*), there were dozens of films from the good to the awful (*The Andromeda Strain*, *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*), there were new friends and old friends, there was meeting and talking to \*T\*H\*E \*A\*U\*T\*H\*O\*R\*S, there was the very fine art show, the Space War game ("Science Fiction Fans like war just as much as the rest of us."), the meetings (1974 *Site Selection Session*, *Science Fiction Writers of America*, *Science Fiction Research Associates*), the exhibits, the auctions and sales, and so on.

Members of the *Society For Creative Anachronism*, part of the Right Wing of science fiction, would have especially liked the costume ball. Up for judging were the panoplies of the past, especially medieval and renaissance Royal Europe. No space suits allowed it seemed. Pagan Emperors crowded out the "Trekkies" (those who like Star Trek a whole lot). Tim Zell,

wearing deer skin, antlers (with a candle attached), and an eight foot boa constrictor wasn't really in costume as it turned out. It's what he wears back in the St. Louis Home Nest of *The Church of All Worlds*, a new pagan religion heavily influenced by such science fiction novels as Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*, Theodore Sturgeon's *More Than Human*, Anderson's *Brain Wave*, and the like.

Why this pursuit of the past in a field that supposedly looks forward? Why was Dr. Walt Dougherty, old-time fan, science fiction art auctioneer extraordinary, and enthusiastic LACON attendee, so interested in talking about his work as curator of properties of the Hollywood Film Museum, a repository for over \$1 million worth of nostalgia? Why the sprinkling of velvet capes in the hotel halls? Why do most fans identify so closely with a particular style of clothing? The style of mid 1950! The hotel was flowering with short hair, Akron sport shirts and baggy trousers.

James Gunn, teacher of English at the University of Kansas, recent past President of the SF Writers of America, and well-known science fiction author said the science fiction fan used to live in a society with no place for the alienated individual. "Today", he says, "where there is much more room for disagreement, for alienation, the Science Fiction Fan seems much more normal." Faint praise indeed.

Other writers attending the LACON cited the years around 1950 as the classic age of science fiction. A. E. Van Vogt, himself an *Astounding* writer from that era, mentioned recently deceased editor John W. Campbell's own *Who Goes There* as well as *Universe* by Robert Heinlein as influences on him from those years. He also mentioned his own *Voyage of The Space Beagle* (now *Mission Interplanetary*) as a favorite.

Hal Clement, High School science teacher and author of the definitive SF novel, *Mission of Gravity*, also listed Campbell's story as well as (please turn to page 3)



Editor Forrest Ackerman believes in happiness (All photographs by Al Satian, Ltd.)

## There is more to science fiction than zap guns

WILLIAM ROTSLER

The hotel elevator door opened and I was staring right at two green-skinned people dressed in what could only be regal rags, with exotic alien jewelry and wrapped around a huge forked stick, an enormous snake. But not one person in the elevator load even blinked. Nearby were several hulking brutes dressed as Norsemen and beyond someone in a skull face and a red satin cavalier's suit and cape, as the Mask of the Red Death.

None of us had stepped into the



Author Harlan Ellison: Hedonist, Gourmet, Friend & Clear Thinker  
Twilight Zone and as far as I know no one was high, it was just the 1972 science fiction fan convention, and it was masquerade ball time.

Every year, some place, there is a Worldcon. This one was the 30th and took place at the International Hotel, near the L.A. airport. Last year it was at Boston and the year before at Heidelberg, Germany. Next year it will be in Toronto and the year after in Washington, D.C. In 1975 it will happen either in San Francisco or Australia, depending how they vote.

Science fiction is in eminent danger of becoming "respectable." They no longer have bug eyed monsters carrying off near-nude girls in diaphanous space suits to do some utterly alien perversion. With men on the moon and a camera orbiting Mars some people think science fiction is over. Ho-ho on them — it's only starting! 2,500 people gathered from three continents and umpteen countries to disprove that s-f (never

sci-fi!) is dead. *Science-fiction is alive and well inside your head!*

You don't get much sleep at conventions, which is traditional. You see people you haven't seen in years, but as Fredrick Pohl said in his Guest of Honor speech, "fandom" is a family and you don't forget family. You may see someone literally only once a year, but it's like last week. The trouble is, you never seem to get enough time to talk to those you want to and too much time with those you don't care that much about.

There are always authors there — Poul Anderson, Larry Niven, Theodore Sturgeon, Harry Harrison, A.E. van Vogt, Hal Clement, Gregory Benford, Dick Lupoff, Jack Williamson, and everyone's target for everything, Harlan Ellison. You might see Terry Carr look like a mad saint or Robert Silverberg light a paper match with his toes. You might see Norman Spinrad spinning or George Clayton Johnson being George Clayton Johnson. There are rooms filled with comic book fandom and hucksters selling old magazines. *Star Trek* still lives at these conventions, though usually considered a "popular" (or lower) form of s-f.

There is an art show that is fantastic in every way. Run every year by the freckled sweat of Bjo and John Trimble displays pro, amateur and novice work of truly exciting nature. There were some extraordinary iron sculptures of demons and birds, there was a large display of original art from comic strips, and the strange alien devices of Don Simpson. We have all heard of Chesley Bonestell, but there is a new young man named Don Davis who excels him in astronomical art.

The art show featured the extraordinary work of a brilliant young man named Tom Kirk, from Long Beach. He exhibited his Lord of the Rings paintings, which is his master's thesis, and any publisher should snatch them up. There were delicate, fragile fantasies by Alicia Austin (who in real life may seem like a quiet, mild-mannered medical illustrator, but is actually the Wanton of the Week when she has a pen in her hand). George Barr's elegant, haughty queens and thoroughly alien aliens are also superb.

Every year's art show seems to uncover a new talent, someone well worth following. There's a lot of shit, naturally, since it is an unjuried show, but the quality of the good stuff is very high indeed. Comments from exhibiting artists are interesting because, if they are new to fandom, they are amazed at the warm reception and enthusiastic response, whereas in regular galleries people don't really know what to make of them.

No convention would be complete without the panels. There was one

on world building, with various writers explaining how they went about constructing the backgrounds, social structure, mores and so forth, based upon the physical properties of a given planetary environment. There were other panels on history of fandom, computers, and god knows what. Actually, people don't really go to science fiction conventions to listen to panels — they go to see people.

I've been going to conventions, on and off, since 1946, and they are all blending together into one big hotel room. It is the seeing and talking and simply being together in that strange community that is the lure. Screw the panels. They may be interesting, as was the world builders, or boring, if they are about something you care not about. So you talk to people, or go see the 24-hour movie room, which shows every damn thing filmed, or so it seems. At this con you could visit the Space War room, a new *divertissement*, and match your wits against a computer at shooting down flying saucers.

There was an almost continuous auction of the old and rare, with money going to the con or to the

building fund of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society, an organization that has been meeting every Thursday night for over 35 years.

There is a sort of Brownian movement always at work, with moving, flowing, idling, rushing masses of people, hundreds of them, roaming the halls at 4:00 A.M., huddled in groups, lone unknowns slumped around, hoping to connect with a party, Big Name Fans and Big Name Authors mixing and unmixing. What do they talk about? Not always science fiction, or fantasy, or what NASA is planning. Not at all. I talked to Sherry Gottlieb, the owner of "Change of Hobbit," an exclusively s-f bookstore in Westwood, about her bosom. You might hear political talk, news of the latest tourney of the Society for Creative Anachronisms, the problems of growing grass, book contracts, good restaurants, and pure science talk.

Science fiction fandom has many sub-fandoms. There is the *Count Dracula Society*, which is what you might expect. There's the Society for Creative Anachronisms, which holds jousts and tourneys in which people (please turn to page 3)



Tim Zell of the pagan Church of All Worlds (St. Louis is their home nest) promoted the past at the WorldCon.



# Science Fiction World Convention

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Jack Williamson's *Legion of Time* plus such writers as Poul Anderson, Ray Bradbury (both of whom attended the LACON) and himself as representative of the 1940's wave of new writers. Others, also still active, include Clifford Simak, Arthur C. Clarke and Isaac Asimov.

From where do the fans come? A Bronx, New York, fan at the LACON says "there's no way to generalize about a science fiction audience." Cathy Wildman is a "Trekie" as well as interested in *The Society For Creative Anachronism*. She feels that

kinds of science fiction. The sword-and-sorcery symbolism is not all there is to science fiction in spite of the evidence of the old glazies at the costume ball. This new consciousness is seen in the writings of people like Robert Silverberg ("Silverbob"), Harlan Ellison (both of whom were at the LACON), "Chip" Delaney (name droppers take note), J. G. Ballard, Ursula LeGuin, Larry Niven, Thomas Disch, Brian Aldis and John Brunner (a further exploration of the brilliant world of his *Stand On Zanzibar* will be out soon titled *The Sheep Look Up*).



An 'Angel' (evidently from another planet) spreads her wings at the costume ball.

it's the dedication to science fiction subdivisions that creates the apparent oddities of some of the fans.

Another fan stated, "It's nice to be with a bunch of people who are crazy in the same way I am." Michael Jensen, Chicago fan, says that it's a way for thinking people with imagination to put their talents to the test by allowing themselves to be individualistic.

Harry Harrison, science fiction writer and editor, discussing the field, said, "They prefer to be in a corner only too often. There is a certain amount of institutionalized paranoia in science fiction."

Charlie Brown, twice Hugo Award Winner for his "fanzine" *Locus*, says "science fiction has become more acceptable to the general public in the last couple of years. 2001: A Space Odyssey helped that quite a bit, being one of the most popular films ever done." Yet, in spite of the upsurge of interest in science fiction, he also informs us that, "the last two years have been very bad for new authors. An author who has been established for a number of years can sell just about everything because, let's face it, most books sell on the name of the author."

And A. E. Van Vogt echoed his words when he commented, "Science Fiction magazines are failing. It's the paperback field where the real writing is being done. *Analog* is not failing. I don't know why it's not because very few science fiction writers read the magazine, but it's got a great readership out there. It is the successful one. Maybe they should go back and look it over and see why it is successful."

Van was a Campbell author, of course, and he may not realize that a lot of people froze their minds in positions of pleasure around 1950 and haven't looked outside since. However, a few readers and writers in the genre have begun to discover the 2nd half of the 20th century, and they're reading and writing new

This is "The New Wave" in science fiction. Does it exist? Some of the old guard say no. Allan Dean Foster, science fiction writer, stated that "it is true that science fiction today has almost been forced by the events of the last 20 years into dealing with human situations that were never considered before." And Charlie Brown, speaking of the "New Wave" says that it is "merely experimental writing that's been popular outside the science fiction field for 50 years. It's more introspective writing than science fiction has been used to for the past 40 years. Science fiction is mostly concerned with ideas and thought, and heretofore not too much with character and mood, and this is merely the addition of character and mood. The problem with it is that the very short stories it produces have just character and mood and throw out the plotting and the ideas, and, of course, to get a really good story you need all four."

Frank Herbert, author of many fine science fiction novels including *Dune* said he can't judge whether there's a "New Wave" partly because he doesn't trust the critics. "It's a misnomer. I think there is some stuff that's called 'New Wave' that is very fine writing, very excellent writing, but a lot of stuff comes in under the guise of 'New Wave' that I think history is going to judge as very poor writing."

And, of course, Poul Anderson has an opinion on the subject. He states, "This 'New Wave' thing was strictly a pseudo construct in the first place and it's really forgotten now within science fiction circles."

One of the possible reasons for the lack of agreement about any "New Wave" is its possible political aspects. Charlie Brown stated that science fiction runs the gamut politically from the Far Left to the Far Right, "and always has. One of the interesting things about science fiction is that it can, and that these people actually talk to each other.

The Far Right is mainly exemplified by Heinlein, Poul Anderson, Jerry Pournelle, mainly the older authors. The Far Left, in fact the radical element, is of course the newer authors. The polarization is very high. There are very few authors who don't have strong opinions. Authors are probably the most opinionated people in the world."

And Hal Clement let it all hang out when he said, "The so-called 'New Wave' has been with us for some years. No one who writes it seems willing to admit that's what he's doing and no one has ever come up with a really satisfying definition of 'New Wave'. I haven't gone into that very far myself because I don't feel comfortable trying to analyze the human character. I've only had a half century or so to study them and they don't make sense to me. So non-humans are very much more fun."

Those remarks seem to echo from science fiction's past, from the days of rocket ships and ray guns and brass bra'd females ready for some man to come to the rescue. Hal Clement continued, "None of my stories have had anything to do with sex, not because I dislike it but because, well, I think of a story as more of an intellectual than a physical activity. If anyone really needs assistance in having his imagination travel in that direction, I think he needs more help than I can give him."

One of the paradoxes becoming manifest in science fiction is the charge of sexism in a field that has done its best to ignore the existence of women (and sex) entirely until that non-existent? "New Wave" got under way a few years ago, Frank Herbert admits, for one, that a lot of science fiction is sexist. Brown, in discussing this subject stated, "Science fiction, like all literature, reflects the society we live in, and the background of the people who write it. And this, of course, is changing, since the society we live in is changing constantly. I don't think science fiction in the past has been any more sexist than any other literature and probably won't be in the future."

Dr. Stanley J. Cook, of California State Polytechnic University at Pomona, co-editor of an academic journal of science fiction titled *Omega*, coming out this Fall, feels that women, "definitely have been discriminated against in almost every area you can think of here. What we have to regard is that they are first of all people who have potential in their own right and that there is no stereotype."

What is it about science fiction that on the one hand leads it into the openness of new ideas about the future, and on the other hand holds it steady, on a 40 year old dream, or even reverts to dreams of a non-existent medieval Golden Age? A lot of people talked to at the LACON felt that science fiction, in spite of its obvious faults, was showing more vitality than mainstream literature. They felt that the dream was still viable. They felt that it was not frozen in attitudes of the past — that it could still inform the forms of literature and perhaps help us hurdle the problems of the future.

Scientific and technical problems, so important in our time, are close to the central concerns of science fiction and if the field can continue to renew itself it may end up as the primary field of literature with any relevance for our time and for the future. As Dr. Cook stated, "One of the things that science fiction might do, and one of the writers mentioned this yesterday, is to create a myth for our time, because we are into space and we are into 'future shock' (please turn to page 4)



Authors Poul Anderson (left) and Robert Bloch

## S.F. more than zap guns

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bash each other with rattan swords. There's the Mythopoeic group which is into swords, sorcery and myths. There's Belly-Button Fandom, Streetcar Fandom, Baskins & Robbins fandom, and monster fandom. Forrest Ackerman, the editor of *Famous Monsters*, and one of the world's kindest men, is always there, emblazoned with badges and buttons, smiling and, well, just always there. Of course, there is psychedelic fandom, but that's everywhere. It is interesting to me to note that the leading exponents of hard booze consumption seem always to be the nuts-and-bolts riveted-sf school of fans and writers.

We saw Harlan Ellison entertain us for an hour of unrehearsed madness before the largest group assembled at the whole con, except



Author Frederick Pohl

perhaps those that came to view the masquerade. Even the banquet was not that big a draw. Harlan is always entertaining. Being his friend is sometimes like having a rogue elephant for a house guest, but he's never dull. What did he talk about? Professionalism in writing was the label, but it hit on everything in the known world, I think. I think even the people that hate him (and there are only two poles about Harlan!) like to watch him in action.

There was skinny-dipping (oh, daring-do!) in the wee hours and at 3:00 A.M. I saw the escalator center being used as a slide down and "dead" bodies grasped the handrail to be pulled to the top again. I talked to Richard Matheson, Jerry Pournelle, Robert Bloch, Philip Jose Farmer, Lester del Rey, Ray Bradbury, and umpteen others. And that reminds me of something, which causes the automatic spacewar to function, flipping us into another paragraphic dimension.

Ask the next person you meet who is a Big Name Science Fiction Author. Nine out of ten will say Ray Bradbury. Maybe Arthur C. Clarke or H.G. Wells or Jules Verne. That seems to be it unless they think of Robert Heinlein. It used to be that they'd say, "But that's not science fiction, that's good!" Bullshit to all of you who so thought. We have come a long way from the purely gadget stories of the Twenties and the gosh-wow stories of the Thirties and the spacewar epics of the Forties. Science fiction is growing in ways you might not believe if you were not keeping aware. From the psychedelic madness of a Philip K. Dick to the smooth coolness of a Robert Silverberg, from the volcanic Ellison to the flesh fantasia of Phil Farmer. Read *Dangerous Visions* and the *Universe* collections. No longer is it "with rayguns blasting" and "screaming rockets" and "welding busbars." *Flash Gordon* is a delight and *Flesh Gordon*, the sex film, will be a killer, but it's camp. It's

mind control and the Way Out through fusion power and Inner Space as well as Outer Space.

I ran into an old friend, Andy Young, who used to be at the Harvard Observatory and now at JPL, and he blew my elfin mind with one line: "If the 200-inch telescope were to photograph the sky for the next thousand years, it would find there are thirty entire galaxies for every human being on the earth today ... and there is an average one hundred billion stars in each galaxy." Get so big you can't hold it, huh? What are you going to call your thirty galaxies? I'm naming one Irving.

Every year there are regional conventions, usually held so that those that cannot make it to the Worldcon can get together. There is a Westcon every year as well, sometimes held with the Worldcon, but usually not, since it rotates here so infrequently. This year's Westcon was on July 4, in Long Beach and next year's will be in Santa Barbara.

But it is the Worldcon that awards the Hugo. This is fandom's Oscar, and it is voted upon in advance by the membership of that year's convention. The SFWA, the Science Fiction Writers of America, also has its awards, the Nebula. These are the biggies, and there are fan awards as well as professional. There are nominations for best fan writer, best artist, best fanzine (amateur publications), and best editor. There are professional awards for short story, novelette, novella, and novel. Robert Bloch gave out this year's goodies and the pro guest of honor was Frederick Pohl. There are fan guests of honor as well, with this year's honorees being Robert and Juanita Coulson.

If you think science fiction started with *War of the Worlds* and ended with *Stranger in a Strange Land*, you have a lot to learn. Come around and get introduced to Conan: the Conqueror, Son of Man, Deathworld, *Again Dangerous Visions*, the Time Patrol and the matter duplicator. As great as 2001 was, it is not all of sf, or fantasy. Heinlein wrote dozens of other books, but try a Niven or an Anderson if you like riveted sf; try a Phil Dick if you want to endanger the ethical structure of your mind; try two Harlan Ellisons before you go to bed, if you can; try the smorgasborg of original speculative fiction collections, like *Nova*, *Universe*, *Alpha* and the best of the yeareprints. It can't hurt. All it can do is change your life forever.

I went to the con high, but not on enhanced air. A new sf magazine was starting, a *West Coast* magazine called *Vector*. Big, slick, with visuals like *Playboy* and a big publicity campaign, a sign that sf was getting more and more acceptance. Then some madman told me he wanted to publish a book of my drawings. Ian Ballantine sat down next to me at the banquet and started to chat and we're discussing two books. It is fairy tale time and I love it.

Science fiction conventions are not like the American Legion or the Grace L. Johnson Storm Door and Airline Company cons. Drunks almost do not exist. There are no cattle prods, scandals, whores (unless she's a fan), waterbags dropped from high places, or police. A little skinny-dip, a lot of grass, and a great flood of thoughts, ideas, laughs, nonsense, serious discussion, love, and madness.

Come around. If you've read all this way you must be interested. See you next Labor Day in Toronto. Get your sense of wonder a fix.



# Science Fiction Convention

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and I think we're all going to have to face rapid change."

Not all of the fans and writers stick their heads so deeply into the sand as Poul Anderson did when he said, "To the extent that there has been an anti-science, or what I personally would call an anti-intelligence movement among certain sections of the intelligentsia, some of this has been reflected in science fiction of course." Or, A. E. Van Vogt who hoped we would not retreat from science and said, "Science is basically neutral and can fit into anywhere. It doesn't have to be pushed away." In fact Tim Zell, of *The Church of All Worlds* and the boa constrictor, summed it up as well as anyone when he said, "Technology is something that can serve the aims of evolution or it can be opposed to them. Much of technology has been used to thwart

natural forces and this sort of technology, technology that produces the rape of the planet of course is something we're opposed to but technology can also be positive. The technologies of the communications industry, the technologies of computers, the technology of space travel, bio-feedback technology of course is very essential."

It is good to realize that one more group, the strange people who go to science fiction conventions, is also becoming concerned about the world we are living in. If we get all the weirdos together perhaps we'll have a large majority when the time to unfreeze the dream arrives. See you at TORCON II in Toronto next year!

*(Mitchell Harding, better known as Uncle Mitch, has a program "Hour 25" on KPFK-FM, which is heard on Fridays from 11 p.m. to 2 a.m.)*