

L.A.con III 1996
A convention report by [Evelyn C. Leeper](#)
(with appendix by [Mark R. Leeper](#))
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Introduction

L.A.con III, the 54th World Science Fiction Convention, was held from 29 August through 2 September 1996 in Anaheim, California. There were approximately 6531 people attending.

L.A.con III did not start auspiciously for us. We were scheduled on a 5:15 PM non-stop from Newark to Los Angeles, but United called us at about 1 PM to tell us that flight was canceled. After some negotiation ("No, we don't want to leave from Kennedy") we ended up on a 5:05 PM flight to Denver, connecting after an hour lay-over with a flight to Los Angeles. So we ended up arriving almost an hour later than we had planned.

Convention Center

The convention center and other facilities were quite reasonable, though having things spread out was a problem. For example, the Voodoo Message Board was in the Marriott, making it inconvenient for people in the Hilton. (Yes, it was available 24 hours a day, which it wouldn't have been if it had been in the convention center. But from looking at its use, I would conclude that it would have been more useful to more people there.)

Also, if site selection is open only during the same time as the panels, dealers room, and so on, it should be in the same location as them, i.e., the convention center. Having to break away from programming to run to another building to vote for site selection is a real nuisance. The other option, of course, is to have longer hours for site selection.

Registration/Program Books/Etc.

Registration was very fast, but then we were there at 8 AM-along with all the other jet-lagged East Coast fans. One of the new features was that everyone got a ribbon (not just Press, Program Participants, etc.), this ribbon being where party stickers could be placed. I used mine to hold my Hugo nominee pins.

My suggestions last year for a Pocket Program were:

- | It should fit in a standard man's shirt pocket.
- | It should have daily grids which include all programming tracks. These should have a *useful* title, participants, room, and time. Evening grids should be part of the daily grids.
- | It should have an index by participant.
- | It should have an art show map, a dealers room map, site maps, street map, and pertinent local information (e.g., ATMs, drugstores, etc.). It is more important to locate the restaurants on the map than the bookstores.

L.A.con III came close to perfect on this. The Pocket Program, supplemented by the five daily grid sheets provided in the registration packet, met all these requirements except the Art Show map, which is not really (in my opinion) a major omission. And they said it couldn't be done!

While I was not a program participant this year (meaning I have no comments on the Green Room), I did contribute to the program, by providing copies of the movies *Quest for Love* and *The Body Snatcher*.

Art Show

Once again, lack of time meant I didn't get to the Art Show. Also contributing to this was the fact that it was in the other hotel, and I was mostly in the Convention Center or my own hotel.

Programming

L.A.con III had 509 program items. Intersection had 501 program items, ConFrancisco had 492, ConAdian had an unknown number (did anyone count them?), MagiCon had 420, Chicon V 520, ConFiction 337, and Noreascon 3 833 (all not counting gaming, films or autograph sessions). One of the L.A.con III committee members observed at ConAdian about the "imbalance" of panels there, with more panels devoted to gay and lesbian topics than to film and video. (I hasten to add that this comment was in fact accurate rather than based on prejudice. One suspects it is harder to get knowledgeable media panelists in Winnipeg than in Los Angeles.) But I notice L.A.con III had ten panels on various aspects of Japanese SF and fandom, and twenty-four(!) items on "Furry Fandom," while having only one panel on alternate histories, and that only a peripheral one. Every convention has its own character and it can only strive to please all of the people some of the time and maybe

even some of the people all the time, though that is unlikely, but it can never please all of the people all of the time.

L.A.con III also had 29 autograph sessions, 69 readings, and 78 gaming items. Considering that some people connected with L.A.con III thought previous conventions "over-programmed," it is interesting that they ended up with about as many items as other Worldcons. And ironically, they also have more "tracks" (or simultaneous programs) than the other conventions, because L.A.con III has scheduled the panels ninety minutes apart instead of hourly. So most of the items are in one of five slots each day (10:00, 11:30, 13:00, 14:30, 16:00) instead of eight (hourly from 10:00 to 17:00). The same number of items in fewer slots means more items per slot.

And my preliminary pass certainly supported this. Instead of the usual one or two items per slot I was interested in, there were two or three, with some time slots even having four. The result is that not only could I see fewer items than usual, but also that I was able to see a smaller percentage of what I was interested in than usual.

While the panels were supposedly an hour long, with half-hour intermissions between them, most panels seemed to expand to fill the time available.

One other change from Standard Operating Procedure was that there didn't seem to be assigned moderators, but rather that each panel decided at the start of the panel who would moderate-or in some cases, didn't decide. This was not always successful, but then the standard method wasn't perfect either. Still, having a pre-determined moderator allows that moderator to try to contact the other panelists ahead of time for discussion, and also lets the programming committee choose good moderators instead of possibly having a loud and assertive, but completely unsuited, person claim the job.

Overlooked Books and Overrated Novels

Friday, 14:30

Charles N. Brown (m), Emma Bull, Patrick Nielsen Hayden, Jean Marc Lofficier

"For some reason, some terrific books just don't sell. Nobody's ever heard of them. Others are taught in college as classics of the field, but no one can understand why. Our panelists let you in on some unknown classics you shouldn't miss while they dismiss some lofty 'classics.'"

Brown stated out by saying that he feels none of what might be labeled "overrated" are really overrated because, after all, people do like them. Nielsen Hayden said that he thought that what was wrong (and perhaps what made this panel necessary?) is that we have gone from a subculture which was passing on the secret information about which of this stuff is good to a subculture that actually believes the packages. "I make those packages," he said, "and they're all lies!"

Lofficier gave another aspect to what Brown had said by saying, "I do not consider that an overrated book is a bad book." (Bull noted that Lofficier was the "only one who did his work before hand and showed up with notes.") Bull also warned, "Very often on panels like this you end up talking about the same books in both categories."

These preliminaries aside, the panelists began listing their overlooked books (also sometimes referred to as underrated books). Brown listed *The Well of the Unicorn* and *The Blue Star* by Fletcher Pratt, *A Specter Is Haunting Texas* by Fritz Leiber, *West of the Sun* and *A Mirror for Observers* by Edgar Pangborn, *The Quincunx of Time* by James Blish, and *Beyond This Horizon* by Robert A. Heinlein. He gave a general recommendation for older fantasy, observing, "Today's fantasy is about fantasy instead of being about worlds and characters."

Nielsen Hayden's overlooked books include *We Who Are About To* by Joanna Russ, and Malzberg's serious fiction about the science fiction world: *Herovit's World*, *Gather In The Hall Of The Planets*,

Galaxies, and "Corridors." (At least some of these are in *The Passage of the Light* from NESFA.) On the other hand, he felt that *Bimbos of the Death Sun* by Sharyn McCrumb is overrated, not because it "makes horrible fun of people who deserve to be made horrible fun of," but because it was (in his opinion) badly done.

As overlooked, Lofficier listed *Double Star* by Robert A. Heinlein (although other panelists felt that couldn't really be considered overlooked), *Candy Man* by Vincent King, *Inside* by Dan Morgan, *The Rose* and *The Ring of Ritornel* by Charles Harness, *The Godwhale* by T. J. Bass, and *Lords of the Starship* by Mark Geston.

Switching to overrated books, Lofficier mentioned *Slan* by A. E. Van Vogt (he said *The Weapon Makers* and *Book of Ptath* were better), *Star Maker* by Olaf Stapledon (recommending instead *Sirius* and *Odd John*), *The Day of the Triffids* by John Wyndham (he prefers *The Kraken Wakes*), *Starship Troopers* by Robert A. Heinlein (which he said was that not only was it a political tract, it was an unsubtle one as well), and *Solaris* by Stanislaw Lem (preferring *The Invincible*). (Someone noted that Michael Kandel, Lem's current translator, thinks the older translation of *Solaris* is very bad, but Lofficier said he had read it in a French translation rather than an English one.)

Nielsen Hayden asked Lofficier why, if he thought that *Starship Troopers* was a political tract, he recommended *Double Star*, another political tract, and speculated that this was because *Double Star* was more in harmony with Lofficier's (and Nielsen Hayden's) own political beliefs.

Bull's overlooked books include *Fitzempress's Law* by Diana Norman; *Oh, Susannah* by Kate Wilhelm; *Engine Summer* by John Crowley; *The Final Reflection* (a Klingon historical novel with a Federation framing sequence), *Web of Angels*, or anything else by John M. Ford; *Possession* by A. S. Byatt; *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez; and *Like Water for Chocolate* by Laura Esquivel. As she noted, "We have difficulty finding books doing good things over there in the fiction section" as opposed to the science fiction section.

Bull said that her overrated books are those that may have been good in their time but "have sat in their bottle too long and gone to vinegar." These include *The Demolished Man* by Alfred Bester and *Have Space Suit, Will Travel* by Robert A. Heinlein.

Brown added a few more overlooked books to his list: *Gerfalcon* by Leslie Barringer (a trilogy), *Bellarion the Fortunate* by Rafael Sabatini (which he said was the basis of Gordon Dickson's Dorsai), *King Solomon's Mines* by H. Rider Haggard, *Om* and *Tros of Samothrace* by Talbot Mundy, and *Kings in Winter* by Cecelia Holland. Lofficier said he would also recommend Mundy's "Jimgrim" books, but Brown thinks those are overrated. (So Bull's warning turned out correct after all.)

Nielsen Hayden recommended *The Jerusalem Quartet* by Edward Whittemore (*Sinai Tapestry*, *Jerusalem Poker*, *Nile Shadows*, and *Jericho Mosaic*). He also recommended Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast*, prefacing it by saying, "It boggles my mind that this is probably an actual underrated novel to someone." And he felt that while Steven Brust's upscale fantasy is recognized, he said, "I want to speak up for the other dumb fantasy adventures" that Brust writes. Someone in the audience mentioned *To Reign in Hell*, asking if the reason for its unavailability was that it had been attacked by Christian fundamentalists. Bull responded that if *To Reign in Hell* had been slammed by the 700 Club, it would have been wonderful for sales. "We couldn't get anybody to complain about the damn book."

More books that Lofficier considered overrated were books he described as "books I don't get": some of the later Gene Wolfe books (such as the "Long Sun" books), *Neuromancer* by William Gibson (which he agrees is seminal but not great, saying *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* by James Tiptree, Jr., or *Web of Angels* by John M. Ford were better but came out too early to be recognized), and most licensed books. Regarding the latter, many people questioned whether these are really rated highly to start with, and Nielsen Hayden noted that "to map a field of pop paraliterature you really have to like the mediocre stuff."

Nielsen Hayden said, "A really great substitute for sleeping pills is *Dune*," and added, "I am bored with world-building [as a substitute for every other form of writing]." Bull said that she enjoyed *Dune*, to which Nielsen Hayden replied, "We were taking different drugs in our own time." But Bull said that she had read it under very hot, dusty conditions and so got a sort of Sensaround version. Also, it was the first science fiction based on ecology to make an impression.

Nielsen Hayden said (along the lines of overrated "classics"), "*Stranger in a Strange Land* is hogwash-was then and is now."

Nielsen Hayden also said "hard science fiction is a very recent invention" (of the last couple of years) which makes spurious claims to be descended from Campbellian science fiction. Bull added that books that are overrated become dated quickly, and ratchets and gears fall into this category. Nielsen Hayden agreed, but noted that "*Mission of Gravity* or the best work of Larry Niven does have a timelessness that keeps it from being dated." (One of Niven's works he cited was "Inconstant Moon," recently made into an "Outer Limits" episode on Showtime.)

Nielsen Hayden said that, as an example, *The Marching Morons* by Frederik Pohl and Cyril Kornbluth dates badly and has an elitist Fifties attitude that the world doesn't have enough intellectuals and too many stupid people, when the real problem is that people who think they are smart do stupid things. Lofficier said that he thinks that Kim Stanley Robinson's "Mars" trilogy will date badly in ten years.

There was a discussion of the blurbs (briefly mentioned at the beginning of the panel) and Nielsen Hayden pointed out that the people writing those blurbs are also the people attending this conventions. Or as Pogo said, "We have met the enemy and he is us."

Religion In SF Books and Movies

Friday, 16:00

Fr. John R. Blaker, Roby James, James Patrick Kelly, T Jackson King (m), Ross Pavlac

"How has science fiction treated religion? Are all faiths created equal?"

[Thanks to Mark for taking notes of the first part of this panel.]

Blaker started by saying, "Ten years ago I don't remember seeing too many of these panels that didn't break out in blows," to which the obvious reply was made: "Give us time."

The panel began with Blaker's proposed definition: "Religion is the human reaction to the presence of the divine or spirit-any of the manifold ways that happens."

In regard to some good treatments of religion in science fiction, King mentioned *Revolt in 2100* by Robert A. Heinlein, *The Incomplete Enchanter* by L. Sprague de Camp, *The Fountains of Paradise* by Arthur C. Clarke, *Walkabout Woman* by Michaela Roessner, and *Retread Shop* by himself. (In my opinion, King spent too much time describing his own book at this point.)

Most of the panelists say they see much more acceptance of religion and spirituality in science fiction than there used to be. Kelly said, "In the last ten or fifteen years, there has been a change." Before, there was a strong anti-religion bias ("You were not saying prayers; you were whipping out slide rules").

The question of alien religions was raised, to which Kelly said, "So what if those other guys out there believe in something different?" When someone mentioned ALH84001 and life Mars, one of the panelists noted that the Vatican had said, "We aware of this, we've been thinking about it, we have a position paper."

Kelly said that one question we needed to ask to discuss this is, "Is the Divine an entire universe that we can become part of, or is it an individual personality?" Pavlac responded, "Religion is an attempt to answer the following three interrelated questions:

- | What is nature of god?
- | What is nature of man?
- | How does man properly relate to God and to man?"

Pavlac also said here are seven models of religion: atheism (there is no God), deism (there is a God who started things up but then stepped back), theism (God started things up and is still involved), pantheism (all is one), panentheism (the universe is God's body), finite godism (God is not omniscient or omnipotent), and polytheism (there are many gods). (I apologize for the brief descriptions and any inaccuracy they have.)

James said that people involved with science often find "the subject of God [...] intellectually embarrassing, because it couldn't lend itself to those fine levels of definition we are used to dealing with." She went on to say, "I don't belong to an organized religion-I'm Jewish," but added that she has been involved in working with Benedictine monks. She said that millennialism was one of the driving forces for the interest in religion today. However, she added, "Spirituality is not necessarily God-centered, but is soul-centered."

King said that Western religions have this dichotomy: God is out there and you are here. But other religions (animism, etc.) don't make this distinction.

At this point, Blaker interjected, "This is religion in science fiction, so we probably should mention some of that." He started by observing that all the Bajorans (on *Star Trek: Deep Space 9*) have the same religion, and that this was a common science fiction "fault," to which Pavlac responded that *Babylon 5*, on the other hand, has a great variety of religions. (Someone asked, "If Sinclair saved the Minbari and Sinclair is Catholic, does that make the Minbari Catholic?" Blaker countered with, "Are Jesuits Catholic? Are Jesuits Christians?") But the panelists did seem to agree that science fiction needed to reflect better the variety of religious practices.

Kelly said that it is difficult to introduce multiple religions on an alien world-it becomes too complicated for the reader. (For that matter, we don't even understand the religions here that we grew up with.)

Pavlac said, "Writers writing about religion are writing about something that they don't know and don't care about," which some panelists disagreed about. Again, *Babylon 5* was mentioned, this time "Passing Through Gethsemane," an episode about forgiveness, repentance, etc.

Kelly thought that we are seeing the extinction of some religions, the same as of some languages, and might see only a very small number here. This could happen on other planets as well. James disagreed, saying we would continue to have different religions because people are different. "Spirituality is an experiential thing." You are in a religion because you are like your co-religionists, but we are not all alike.

James thought it interesting that Buddhism started in India, but it is no longer dominant there, while it is dominant in other areas. (Of course, the same is true of Christianity in the Middle East.)

Pavlac felt that "in order for Judeo-Christianity to merge with Eastern religions, Judeo-Christianity would have to surrender all its core values and we just ain't going to do it." As I noted later, there is no such religion as "Judeo-Christianity" and the use of the term seems to me either wishful thinking that we are all the same, or a specific political agenda to attempt to make Christianity (usually fundamentalist Protestantism) seem much more universal than it is. As someone noted, linguistically "Judeo-Christianity" makes Judaism subservient to Christianity, and people who use it should

consider if they would be as sanguine about the term "Christo-Judaism" (or even more historically parallel, "Christo-Islam"). The term "Judeo-Christianity" also excludes Islam, which is clearly of the same tree, and any similarities between Judaism and Christianity seem to extend to Islam as well. A better term might perhaps be "the Abrahamic faiths."

Someone claimed that in science fiction, we never go anywhere where there are basically the same religions as ours. Someone else gave the counter-example of "The Man" by Ray Bradbury. Someone else said that Zoroasterism is never used as a science fiction premise. No one had a counter-example to this.

Someone asked if there is an attitude in the religious world that hates mythology, to which Blaker replied, "There is a de-mythologizing trend among some theologians in many faiths."

Someone asked, "Why did publishers started putting out books on Christian themes? Are they no longer afraid of getting into sectarian disputes?" Pavlac said he didn't really see this happening. Rather, people say, "I've read C. S. Lewis; now what?" He did mention one book, *This Present Darkness* by Frank E. Peretti, which is Christian science fiction and sold 1,800,000 copies.

Kelly said that if we do see this trend, it may be because books can be successful with smaller sales now, because they can be targeted better, so publishers are more willing to aim for niche markets using "pinpoint marketing." Blaker thought it was a "millennial thing"-religious bookstores are sprouting up like weeds.

Someone asked that since we compare God to ourselves and tie into our environment, what would a God in an alien environment look like? Blaker agreed this was an interesting question, but warned, "You're trying to tell a story that people will want to read," and making it *too* alien would not work. King said, "Can we write alien aliens and if we could, would they be worth reading about?"

Someone in the audience said that the perception is that publishers and editors are atheist so they publish only things that support that. Pavlac seemed to agree, saying that he thinks publishers are religiously motivated; Kelly strongly denied this.

An audience member said, "In the introduction to *Sacred Visions*, Andrew Greeley suggests Catholicism fits better with science fiction than Protestantism," with which Blaker disagreed, saying, "Greeley is known as the man without an unpublished thought-by his bishop." Pavlac somewhat agreed, however, saying, "Catholics have a better handle on mysticism than Protestants do."

Another audience member suggested that religion now is more ritualistic and less theological-more like Graeco-Roman culture than like early Judaism or Christianity. He pointed to our political conventions as a sort of "civic religion" centering on ritual. Blaker said that as far as that went, the Catholic Church had the oldest bureaucracy in the world. James said quoted someone as saying, "Ritual is not a path; it is a reminder that there is a path."

For further reading, there is a Christian Fandom Recommended Reading List at <http://www.enteract.com/~rpavlac/ctnfandm.htm> (with more information about the organization "Christian Fandom"), and a Jewish science fiction bibliography at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/4208/jewishsf.html>.

Miscellaneous

I presented the Sidewise Award for Alternate History (Short Form) to Stephen Baxter (at one of his panels) for his story "Brigantia's Angels." The other two winners, Paul J. McAuley (Long Form, *Pasquale's Angel*) and L. Sprague deCamp (Special Achievement) were not present at L.A.con III.

We had a Malaysian dinner with Peter Reiher, a Net friend, and afterwards talked with Bruce Burdick

about our various travels (he had just returned from Eastern Europe). We dropped in at the Boston in 2001/Noreascon I Silver Anniversary party and the Australia in '99 party. While the fact that the party rooms opened onto the Hilton lanai made the rooms much less crowded, I'm still not a party animal, so you'll have to get your party reports elsewhere.

Overrated Films and Overlooked Movies

Friday, 10:00

John L. Flynn, Don Glut, Ric Meyers, Bill Warren (m)

"There are some films with a bad reputation but which are really quite good. There are some films with a good rep which are just dogmeat. A few highly opinionated film fans will discuss these overrated films and overlooked movies with the aide of the audience."

As with the similar panel on books, a caveat was given, this time by Warren: Overrated movies are not necessarily bad, and underrated ones are not necessarily great. For example, he said that *Vertigo* is overrated but still good, and *Return of Dracula* is underrated without being great.

Flynn's overlooked films include *The Man Who Laughs* and *Solaris*. On the other hand, he thinks *Buckaroo Banzai* is overrated.

Meyers thinks *Return of the Jedi* is overrated and explained why. According to him, the previous films left lots of "trap doors" to allow actors to leave, but when none left, these threads were just dropped instead of dealt with. He also listed *Diamonds Are Forever* as overrated, but felt that *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* was underrated (if not exactly overlooked).

Warren said that he thought that John Carpenter is most overrated director in history of horror cinema, based in large part on his opinion of *Halloween*. Myers thinks that in that film it's a lot of different people under the mask, and Michael Myers is just masterminding it. Glut noted that most horror directors today started out with a good film-Stuart Gordon (*Re-Animator*), John Carpenter (*Dark Star*), George Romero (*Night of the Living Dead*)-but then sank. David Cronenberg, he said, is the exception. Warren added, "No matter how bad a director Carpenter is, he is a worse writer."

Meyers gave the following guidelines: If the movie starts out with an aerial shot of the city it takes place in, it's probably a bad film. When the hero becomes a reckless endangerment (as in *The Rock*), it's a sign of a bad film. If the main character is an asshole, it's probably a bad film (for example, the remake of *The Thing* with Kurt Russell destroying the computer in a moment of irritation). If Randy Quaid is in the movie, go home.

Someone asked about Ridley Scott; the panelists felt he is not overrated. Meyers said that *Bladerunner* started well, but ended poorly (like 95% of all movies).

Warren said that James Cameron was the opposite of John Carpenter, a better director than he is a writer.

Meyers said his favorite bad science fiction science is in *Independence Day* (too obvious a target, in my opinion). Flynn said that this reminded him that *Battle in Outer Space* was overlooked. Warren noted that *Independence Day* ripped off *War of the Worlds* and *Earth Vs. the Flying Saucers* and would have ripped off more English-language alien invasion films except that was all there were.

Warren felt that *The Innocents* was overrated, because Kerr is a shade hysterical, and the film can't decide if the ghosts are real or not. Glut and Meyers disagreed. Glut said *The Innocents* is a scary movie; the Freddy Kruger movies are fun movies, but they're not scary. Warren said that ambiguity should be built into the material; there shouldn't be a checklist for it.

Another overrated film Warren listed was *Night of the Living Dead* (stolen from Matheson's *Last Man*

on Earth). Glut felt that many Lugosi films were overrated; while he was a good actor, he was at the mercy of his director.

Glut said that he thought *House of Dracula* was overrated, but that *House of Frankenstein* was overlooked. Meyers thought *Godzilla's Revenge* was overrated (it's hard to believe anyone rates it high enough to call it overrated), but that *Destroy All Monsters* was overlooked.

Warren thought Tod Slaughter films in general were overlooked, saying that Tod Slaughter makes Vincent Price look like Robert Stack. On the other hand, he thought *Highlander* overrated, saying it had a Frenchman playing a Scotsman explaining haggis to a Scotsman playing an Egyptian disguised as a Spaniard. Also, no one seems to notice that a parking lot has blown up. Regarding the immortality motif, he says that the Highlander is fighting all the other immortals so that he can be the last one-and so die. Why not just let them cut his head off? Warren quoted Woody Allen: "I do not want to achieve immortality through my work. I want to achieve immortality through not dying."

Glut thought *Star Wars* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* were overrated. In the latter, for example, Indiana Jones does nothing heroic, and basically murders the Arab who has the sword. And the acting in the former was pretty bad (except for Peter Cushing). This led to a discussion of acting. Meyers said, "Sometimes better actors don't come over as well on screen." He observed that Steve McQueen out-acted Hoffman in *Papillon*, because you could see that Hoffman was working, but McQueen was "just there." (For *Marathon Man*, Hoffman stayed awake thirty-six hours for a scene in which his character had been awake thirty-six hours, leading Laurence Olivier to ask, "My dear boy, have you ever considered acting?")

Glut said he recently rewatched *Inherit the Wind*, and thought that Spencer Tracy was a real character, while Frederic March was acting. Warren said that March did both in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, convincing as Hyde but unconvincing as Jekyll. Meyers said that another problem was that Hollywood has no idea how to make realistic villains or realistic heroes (except in *Apollo 13*).

Further recommendations from Glut were *The Colossus of New York*, *Tormented*, *One Million Years B.C.*, and Tod Browning's films (though he felt that Browning's *Freaks* was overrated).

Meyers mentioned Sergio Corbucci movies, Nicholas Roeg's *Don't Look Now*, Kenji Misumi's films (such as *Zatoichi*), *Homicidal*, *House on Haunted Hill*, and *Five Million Years to Earth*.

Warren listed *Non-Stop New York*; *It Came from Outer Space*; *Donovan's Brain*; *Magnetic Monsters*; *Not of This Earth*; *X the Unknown*; *I Was a Teenage Werewolf*; *Kronos*; *The Monolith Monsters*; *It Challenged the World*; *The Day the Earth Caught Fire*; *The Werewolf*; *I, Madman*; *Manitou*; *Horror Express*; *It!*; *Dracula*, *Prince of Darkness*; the *Hammer Mummy*; *The Hidden*; *Trancers*; *Strange Invaders*; *Android*; *Alien*; the *Invasion of Body Snatchers* remake; *The Man Who Fell to Earth*; and *Seconds*. (It sounds like he thinks everything is overlooked.)

Flynn thought *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, *Theater of Blood*, *Dragonslayer*, *Alphaville*, *La Jetee*, and *Quest for Love* were overlooked. Warren mentioned *The Quiet Earth*.

Someone asked about "guilty pleasures" (not really part of this panel). Warren named *The Amazing Colossal Man* and *Attack Of The Crab Monsters*. Flynn's was *Death Race 2000*, Meyers's was *Espy*, Glut's was *The George Raft Story*.

Someone in the audience felt *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* was overrated, but Meyers said that this is the best portrayal of psychos Hollywood has done. Someone else suggested that *The Haunting* was overlooked. The panel felt it was not, but that *The Uninvited* was, as well as *The Wicker Man*.

I mentioned George Romero's *Knightriders* as overlooked and Warren agreed. Meyers thought *The Last Valley* was overlooked. Mark Leeper suggested *Rocketeer*, *Something Wicked This Way Comes*,

and *Exorcist II* as overlooked, at which Meyers nearly keeled over in shock, saying "I'm not saying you're a bad guy. You may be a wonderful guy, but let's never talk." Warren, on the other hand, thought that the original *Exorcist* was overrated. He also agreed that *Something Wicked This Way Comes* resonates the way a Bradbury story should.

Other overlooked films mentioned by the audience included *Dracula's Daughter* and *Black Sunday*, as well as *Fail-Safe*, which suffered from following *Dr. Strangelove*.

The Future Of Religion

Friday, 11:30

Fr. John R. Blaker, David M. Honigsberg, Alexandra E. Honigsberg, J. Gregory Keyes, James Morrow (m), Ross Pavlac

"What should we expect from our many religions as we enter the new century? If we ever leave Earth will we take our religions with us? Should we?"

A. Honigsberg is a priest candidate in the Old Catholic Church at Union Theological Seminary. (The Old Catholic Church has been split off from the Roman Catholic Church for several hundred years and has ordained women and married priests since its beginning.) D. Honigsberg is a rabbinical candidate at Union Theological Seminary. This makes their marriage interesting.

Keyes is an anthropologist working on an alternate history fantasy of Isaac Newton and theology. Blaker is a Roman Catholic priest ordained just three months ago who started by saying, "As far as the future of religion, mine has had a good track record, in terms of staying power if nothing else." D. Honigsberg responded, "My religion has a pretty good track record too, I should mention." Morrow has written many books on religious themes; his latest, *Blameless in Abaddon*, he described as a retelling of the book of Job. He suggested the panelists talk about religious understanding and the interaction with the physical world.

D. Honigsberg said he would like to see more ecumenicalism and dialogue, and "a movement away from the rigid seminary structures" and back to a more open seminary system. A. Honigsberg said, "There is a big difference between faith and religion. Faith is how you feel. Religion at its best is a community expression of how these personal faiths relate to deity on a common ground." Perhaps in response to Morrow's suggestion, she said that as far as science went, "Science becomes not a threat ... but a confirmation and a rejoicing in the wonders of the universe."

As was noted by Roby James in yesterday's "Religion in SF" panel, Honigsberg emphasized that we are not all thinking the same things and just calling it different names. But Pavlac sees more of an interfaith trend, and searching for core values and interests in the various faiths. For example, he said that liberal Lutherans and Episcopalians have more in common with each other than with the more conservative members of their own faiths.

Blaker thinks that the massive denial of death in United States will cause people trouble if they have written off religious things. Morrow responded, "Religion is the engine fueling the denial of death, not bailing us out." Pavlac thinks atheism will die out and that the final battle will be between Western and Eastern religions. (There followed a discussion of whether atheism is a religion, or perhaps a faith, with Morrow on Pavlac on opposite sides, with Morrow stating emphatically: "I don't think atheism is a religion, Ross.") Pavlac again listed the seven types of religion (see "Religion in SF" panel)

Keyes said he works with coherent societies where everyone believes the same thing, is related to each other, and so on. In these societies, there is no sense of choice in religion. But in our culture, Keyes said, "religion is a sort of a consumer product, in the sense that you can shop around and choose." He described this as "perhaps the antithesis of faith." Along the same lines, he liked the film *Black Robe* because the Jesuit priest did not "go native" and decide the Hurons were right. Several

panelists noted that syncretism made very little sense to theologians of the past.

Morrow asked, if we travel into space, what happens to our geographic-based beliefs (Mecca, Bethlehem, Mt. Sinai)? A. Honigsberg reminded the audience that hundreds of years ago, these places were very remote to most believers, and they would never travel to them anyway. A. Honigsberg thinks in space there will be a return to house worship rather than big churches. (It's interesting to note that in *The Jew in the Lotus* by Rodger Kamenetz, one of the things the Jews say kept Judaism alive through the Diaspora is the large amount of the religion based in the home rather than in a temple, and suggested a similar transition might help Tibetan Buddhism through its period of exile.)

Pavlac said that space travelers will have an advantage over previous travelers in that they will be able to take their sacred writings. Earthly travelers often could not, which is why Japanese Christianity from the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries had no writings to work from and became quite divergent. Blaker sees an incorporation of local beliefs into our religions (assuming of course we find inhabitants with local beliefs). Morrow agreed, saying "The measure of a religion's potential and future is its plasticity." Pavlac again returned to his theme of core beliefs (as opposed, I suppose, to external beliefs being adopted), saying that "low church" is greatly different from Greek Orthodox, but holds the same core values and beliefs. D. Honigsberg said that in Judaism the Passover seder may incorporate the Exodus from earth along with the Exodus from Egypt. (Even now, many Seders incorporate other liberation themes, including Holocaust remembrance.) A. Honigsberg added that these sorts of changes are important, because "ritual helps put progressions of life into concrete expressions."

D. Honigsberg observed that organized religion doesn't propagate animosity as much as congregations do, though A. Honigsberg observed that orthodoxy by its nature is exclusionary. Keyes felt that doctrinal differences are often political differences that are rubber-stamped with doctrinal approval.

Someone in the audience asked whether "extraordinary religion" (which they defined as formed, such as Christianity) would give way to "ordinary religion" (unformed, such as New Age). The panelists noted that there were a *lot* of assumptions in the question as phrased, so many that it was probably unanswerable. D. Honigsberg said that we have either "a melting pot or a tossed salad," but don't have the same tribal mentalities and beliefs that other cultures do. Another audience question was paraphrased by Morrow as, "Doesn't conversion cut both ways, particularly when dealing with creatures breathing methane?" Blaker thought that we had some interesting examples here, particularly Voudon and Santeria as fusions of Catholicism and African religions. D. Honigsberg thought "a faithquake will probably affect both cultures." There will be some cross-fertilization, and people will come out stronger and more open. A. Honigsberg said that large mass conversions come with a war but don't last. But those who come to help first, rather than conquer, often encourage people to ask what drives them to try to help people, and this leads to more lasting conversions. Pavlac agreed, saying, "Celtic Christianity spread on the power of its ideas and the character of the people spreading it."

Someone in the audience asked the panelists, "How can you claim to fairly represent religion?" to which one of the panelists replied, "We don't determine what panels we're on; a higher power does that."

Someone else asked about life on Mars. D. Honigsberg pointed out that Judaism refers to God as "King of the Universe." To which Morrow added, "I've always liked that line from the Jewish prayers: 'King of the Universe'-what a science fictional idea!"

On a more pessimistic note, Blaker reminded us, "Whatever people care about deeply, they're going to kill other people for." Keyes said that while religion was something people cared about, it was also about "How do I get what I want?" One panelist noted that most theologians agreed that "God doesn't deal in little red wagons." (Or as someone else put it, "God is not a cargo-cult deity.")

An audience member asked if new revelations will occur in Judaism and Catholicism. Blaker said no: that's one of the dogmas (at least for general revelation, though individual revelation is a separate issue). D. Honigsberg was not sure. "Rabbis will continue to wrestle with questions to reinterpret the Law for the time and place the Law is active." And A. Honigsberg agreed, saying that evolution changes things so much that they may look like revelation. Pavlac agreed for a different reason: "God always reserves the right to make new revelations if he chooses."

Funny Stories From Science Research and Development

Friday, 13:00

Dr. Jim Busby, Dave Clements (m), Howard Davidson, Bill Higgins, Charles S. Tritt

"Our panelists will entertain you (and frighten you) with personal experiences and other true stories about the R-and-D business."

This panel was apparently originally titled "Tall Technical Tales." In any case, my rendition of it would be sadly inferior to the original, so I will not try for as extensive a description as usual, but rather just for a sense of the panel. Since all the panels were recorded, if you're really interested, you might inquire about the tape.

Higgins started by saying, "My job is now-God help me-radiation safety." Davidson observed, "One of most dangerous things a researcher can have these days is macho," and then went on to describe someone pipetting a dangerous radioactive substance by merely inhaling on the pipette when someone slammed a door, causing a rapid intake of breath. Apparently there was some treatment involving keeping the person on beer for a week, but he was also told to get a vasectomy.

Busby noted that at one point they put the gyroscope in backwards in a Jupiter rocket. (Someone later told of a Navy seaman who put the fuse in a depth charge in backwards. Asked why, he replied, "I put the fuse in the other way and it went in so easily I knew that couldn't be correct for Navy equipment.")

Someone else described safety inspectors complaining about meaningless wires without noting they were writing their reports on a 50-gallon drum of hexane.

Clements told of someone gargling with liquid nitrogen, which shocked the plaque off his teeth, but then he swallowed. As the liquid gasified and expanded he discovered that he needed to go to the toilet, but didn't quite make it. He also belched for a minute solid. Higgins said that he liked liquid nitrogen ice cream, where you pour liquid nitrogen into the bowl with the ingredients and stir like a madman. Liquid nitrogen will also remove floor tiles rather spectacularly.

Busby said that at Peenemunde the workers drank up the alcohol that was intended for rockets. So the manufacturers added a chemical to the alcohol that caused burning urination.

Clements talked about starting barbecues with oxygen from oxyacetylene torches, or soaking charcoal briquettes in liquid oxygen to make a high explosive. Sealing cryogens in plastic bottles also makes big explosions.

Someone reported coming in one morning to check the earthquake data and found out there had been an earthquake, worldwide, 9.7 on the Richter scale, with one casualty. It turns out that this is how an AI program interpreted the headline, "Pope's Death Rocks World." (I ran across a story about a story about the Hiroshima exhibit at the Smithsonian in a newsgroup devoted to gay and lesbian issues. It turns out that in the story were the words "Enola Gay.")

Someone who worked at astronomical observatories said that when you're working at 14,000 feet, you get rather stupid from lack of oxygen. For example, someone at an observatory called down to say, "I have this piece of metal. I have cut it three times and it's still too short to fit in the slot."

Don't put a nuclear magnetic resonator next to train tracks or parking lots.

After a panelist's co-worker burned out his radiation badge, he borrowed some one else's.

Don't use an aluminum pot with lye.

Someone in Wisconsin decided his bicycle tires needed air, so inflated them outside while it was 20 degrees below zero. Then he brought the bike inside.

Don't throw your wallet (with credit cards) through an MRI chamber. Don't do just about anything with iron or steel near an MRI chamber.

Marvin Minsky, who is very bald, almost became the first person to be killed by a robot. It seems the robot had been taught to play ping-pong....

The panelists reminded us that accidents usually need *both* design error and operations error.

Dinosaurs

Friday, 16:00

Greg Bear (m), Stephen Dedman, Don Glut, Robert J. Sawyer

"A panel of experts tell all. Or some. Like, what's the real story behind the changing shape of brontosaurus heads. And how come we never see the skeletons of baby dinosaurs. Were they warm-blooded or cold-blooded?"

Sawyer started by saying, "The nice thing about dinosaurs is that everything keeps changing and things keep being discovered all time." For example, they recently determined the shape of dinosaur pupils by examining the bones around the eyes. (No, I don't understand how.)

Dedman thought there was more: "They're wonderful creatures but we're perfectly safe from them." Or as he later said, "Big, fierce, and extinct." Sawyer added, "Also alien," and they really existed. And finally, they have the elements of a murder mystery.

Glut said that taxonomy is changing constantly. For example, Gorgosaurus and Albertosaurus used to be considered two separate species. Then it was decided they were really the same. Now the pendulum is swinging back, and they are again considered different. "They used to say that paleontology is a dead science."

Bear had just finished a sequel to Doyle's *Lost World*, and remarked that many paleontologists get into science fiction because of their interest in dinosaurs. For example, Phil Curry became an Edgar Rice Burroughs fan from wanting to read fiction about paleontology. In other media, Glut just directed "Dinosaur Valley Girls." (As he said, "You've heard of dinosaur DNA? This is dinosaur T&A.")

Birds are now officially classified as dinosaurs but Sawyer said, "For most of us there is a qualitative difference between Tyrannosaurus rex and a pigeon." However, Sawyer said there is also an "overwhelming desire, sometimes to supersede the evidence, to say they're not extinct."

Someone cited a Ray Bradbury story titled "Apart from a Dinosaur, What Do You Want to Be When You Grow Up?" There is also an annual "DinoFest," sort of like a Worldcon for dinosaur fans.

At the mention of *Raptor Red* (which Bear had read and liked), the panelists said that the term "raptor" is being misused (or being changed). For example, the Toronto basketball team is called Raptors and uses a dinosaur as its emblem. Sawyer thought that *Jurassic Park* used "T rex" and

"raptor" to protect the trademarks of toys, but others pointed out that they did use "velociraptor" as well.

In Hollywood, many special effects people don't see dinosaurs as animals; they see them as monsters, so accuracy means nothing. But to people who understand dinosaurs, what Hollywood does is the same as giving an elephant two trunks, or the same as having crocodiles, kangaroos, and giraffes in same scene in a movie. In *Fantasia*, for example, dinosaurs have three claws because Walt Disney thought it looked better than the more accurate two claws. Also, the well-known waving tails looked cool, but are inaccurate.

The pendulum seem to be balancing off between warm- and cold-blooded. Small therapods were probably endothermic; large ones were probably exothermic. The problem is that we keep looking for an answer as an analogue of present-day animals. As Bear said, "We have to stop thinking in terms of 'this or that.'" For example, tuna (and moths) are hot-blooded, but only when they are moving.

The Retro-Hugo Award Ceremony
Friday, 17:00
Robert Silverberg, Toastmaster

"In contrast to Sunday night's Hugo Awards presentation, we are proud to present the Retro-Hugos, dating back to the 1940's for works that had gone unrecognized. The winners of the Retro-Hugos will be announced here."

And the winners were:

- | **BEST NOVEL:** "The Mule", by Isaac Asimov (*Astounding*, November-December 1945; also published as Part II of *Foundation and Empire*)
- | **BEST NOVELLA:** *Animal Farm*, by George Orwell (Secker and Warburg; Harcourt Brace; etc.)
- | **BEST NOVELETTE:** "First Contact", by Murray Leinster (*Astounding*, May 1945) (also available in *The Astounding Science Fiction Anthology*, ed. John W. Campbell, Jr.; *Stories for Tomorrow*, ed. William Sloane; *Best of Science Fiction*, ed. Groff Conklin; *Contact*, ed. Noel Keyes; *First Step Outward*, ed. Robert Hoskins; *Science Fiction Hall of Fame Volume 1*, ed. Robert Silverberg; *First Contact*, ed. Damon Knight; *The Astounding-Analog Reader, Volume One*, ed. Harry Harrison & Brian W. Aldiss)
- | **BEST SHORT STORY:** "Uncommon Sense", by Hal Clement (*Astounding*, September 1945) (also available in *Small Changes*; *The Old Masters*, ed. Brian Davis)
- | **BEST DRAMATIC PRESENTATION:** *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) Pandro S. Berman, producer; Albert Lewin, director and screenplay
- | **BEST PROFESSIONAL EDITOR:** John W. Campbell, Jr. (*Astounding Science Fiction*)
- | **BEST PROFESSIONAL ARTIST:** Virgil Finlay
- | **BEST FANZINE:** *Voice of the Imagi-Nation*, edited by Forrest J. Ackerman
- | **BEST FAN WRITER:** Forrest J. Ackerman
- | **BEST FAN ARTIST:** William Rotsler

Robert Silverberg described science fiction in 1946 by saying, "Science fiction was smaller. It was quieter. Why, the trilogy had barely been invented." Of fandom, he said, "The mimeograph machine was the Internet of the day."

He also said that he believed that he and Forry Ackerman are the only people to have attended all the Hugo ceremonies.

So far as I could tell, there was more question as to whether Clinton would get re-nominated than whether Campbell would win as Best Professional Editor. The other categories had somewhat more competition, and the fan awards generated a fair amount of controversy as to whether they accurately represented what would have won in 1946, or what today's fans prefer.

Technically, the award ceremony was marred by an over-complicated design: Silverberg would read the names of the fiction nominees, then slides of the original appearance (including the illustrations) would be shown while a voice-over read an excerpt. There were a few problems, however. First, there was not enough time (or sufficient cueing) for Silverberg to read the name of each selection. Second, the slides and the audio excerpts were not in the same order. And lastly, whoever was running the slides didn't know how long the audio excerpts were or how many slide were for each and tended to run ahead and then back up. I read all the stories and *I* found this confusing. I can only imagine how it was for someone who was unfamiliar with the stories. (It probably was like Silverberg's experience in reading A. E. Van Vogt's *World of Null-A*. He was reading it in serial form, in magazines he bought used-and in the order he bought them. So first he read the second installment, then the third, and finally the first.)

I had to leave a bit early, because we had arranged to meet friends for dinner at 6:30, thinking that fewer Hugos would be a shorter ceremony, but the fact that it started fifteen minutes late may have been the main problem there.

Treks Not Taken
Friday, 21:00
Steven R. Boyett

"With musical accompaniment, Steven R. Boyett reads and performs selections from his new book, "Treks Not Taken", Star Trek vignettes as if written by Anne Rice, Ernest Hemingway, Herman Melville, J. D. Salinger, and Jack Kerouac."

Actually, the authors Boyett did at this performance were J. D. Salinger ("Crusher in the Rye"), Anthony Burgess ("A Clockwork Data"), Herman Melville ("Moby Trek"), and Jack Kerouac ("On the Bridge").

Sample: "Call me irresponsible. Some years ago-the stardate is unimportant now-the irresistible motivation of several outstanding warrants and the certainty of my impecunious nature, caused me to enlist about a Federation starship, for just as some men hold the briny Sea in their hearts, I have empty Space in my head."

Boyett also occasionally made asides to the audience, including "It's scary how well it fits," and "I don't think it makes any less sense than last year's *Star Trek* season."

I highly recommend the book (Sneaker Press/Midnight Graffiti, ISBN 1-882813-05-7, \$12.95), which satirizes seventeen more authors. If you can't find it in your local bookstore, it can be ordered from Mark Ziesing (P. O. Box 76, Shingletown CA 9608, <http://www.ziesing.com>).

Parties

The only party I went to was the Readercon party. Next year's Readercon Guest of Honor is Kim

Stanley Robinson-it should be a good one.

Death of the Book

Saturday, 10:00

Steven R. Boyett (m), John Clute, Jessie Horsing, Martha Soukup, Michael J. Ward

"It's been predicted several times but it still hasn't arrived. What's keeping books around? What are the alternatives? Why aren't they making a louder noise?"

Horsing was added at the last minute by Boyett, who felt there should be a publisher on the panel. Perhaps, but Horsing was not the best choice as she seemed to be discussing a different question than the rest of the panelists, and also shouting them down too much of the time.

The panelists began by trying to distinguish between the book as something that is read and the book as a physical object. Which the panelists were supposed to be discussing was a matter of conjecture.

Ward works at Adobe, which is looking at a program called Acrobat for implementing the personal electronic book. Boyett was curious about this: "Why are we looking for a substitute?" to which Ward responded, "Who's looking for a substitute?" Even a middle ground is controversial; Boyett observed, "A lot of writers' gut reaction is to resist [the idea of books on demand]."

One panelist quoted a recent essay by Salman Rushdie, which refutes the idea that people don't want books any more; they want multi-media. (Umberto Eco also took the same position in an article reprinted in the *World Press Review*). And many companies who went the multi-media route have gone out of business.

But there is still the issue of the death of reading versus the death of books. Are people reading more now than ever? Panelists said that more books are being sold by fewer authors than ever before, but that this didn't really answer whether people were reading more (albeit from fewer authors). Soukup noted, however, that a given author is more concerned about how well s/he is doing rather than whether Danielle Steel is selling four times as much. "Writers have no philosophical sense, they have philosophical agendas." Soukup also noted that "short story writers get no response," at least outside the somewhat specialized world of science fiction.

Another problem in analyzing readership, or at least in our analyzing readership as a thought exercise, is that book readers hang around together and think everyone reads books.

Returning to the multi-media "revolution," Clute said, "Everybody felt that the technology [of multimedia] led experience." However, reading is different than using multimedia. Reading a story is "recognizing" the author's story. We want that rather than hypermedia, multi-ending stories, because we get to create options in our daydreams; we want story-tellers to tell *their* stories. In other words, readers do not want active participation in the process. And as Boyett said, "A writer who abrogates his auctorial authority/responsibility is not a writer." Along these lines, Soukup pointed out that even three-year-olds distinguish between playing a game with rules that they can change and reading a book that has to be the same each time. Woe betide the parent who doesn't read the book exactly the same way as last night.

But Boyett said, "The book is changing as a perceived entity." He talked a bit about the death of the midlist. Ward also noted, "It's a mistake to confuse the death of the book with the availability of a multiplicity of options." Horsing thinks that Clute said books are dead because no good writing is going on, and (I thought) said that Tor Books had just announced that they will not be publishing new authors any more, but I must have misunderstood because Beth Meacham later said this was absolutely incorrect.

Boyett said, "By definition most stuff is mediocre," and Clute said that it's more a marketing problem

than whether story-telling or the book is dead. He reassured us that the current state of chaos is temporary, leading Boyett to say, "There will be a new state of chaos."

Ward brought it back to basics: "The hard part is figuring out what you what to buy and what you want to read." Before, reading always was private, but there was a shared set of books people read, and that is going away with small and mini-presses. Boyett described this as "Literary Darwinism," but Clute said, "Darwinism can't work where's there's no test." (If there are enough outlets that everything can get published, there is no winnowing.) Horsing said that Clute seemed to feel we are entering the Dark Ages, and Clute agreed. Boyett said, "We are living in the present tense," but Clute responded, "I think we're heading for the dark."

The panelists then drifted to the question, "Is the novel dead?" Horsing asked, "Can you write *Frankenstein* again?" to which Soukup immediately said, "Of course, you can write *Frankenstein* again," and Ward responded, "Why would you want to write *Frankenstein* again?" The question seemed to turn on whether we can separate form from content. (Was writing the death of the bard? What about books on tape?) Clute said, "*Frankenstein* is the recognition of a new paradigm; *Dracula* was an anxiety novel."

Clute said that story-telling is subversive, and that novelizations are the most sanitized of all forms. Boyett disagreed with the first part of this statement, saying "You are not going to instigate a revolution by writing books." However, Clute said that Romanians spoke of Clute's encyclopedia as an atlas of what they thought was their liberating literature. Boyett said this was more because science fiction is commiserative rather than subversive: "The world will roll over you and grind you to dust beneath its chariot wheels and not even feel the bump." Clute insisted that reading science fiction in Romania was actually dangerous.

Boyett noted that something really scary is that *Fahrenheit 451* is now available as a computer game (as is "I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream"). As Boyett said, "I am in Hell."

The session degenerated into a shouting match about technology, with someone saying that computer books won't succeed because they've been around for thirty years and haven't caught on. I would just note that television took well over twenty years to catch on.

Alternate Histories In Reality

Saturday, 11:30

Michael F. Flynn, Lisa Goldstein, T Jackson King, Teresa B. Nielsen Hayden (m), S.M. Stirling, Harry Turtledove

"Science fiction is filled with 'alternate histories'. But so are history books. 'History is written by the victors,' wrote Machiavelli. Time does its part for re-writing history, too. Alternate histories abound. Think American Indians were noblemen of the plains who all lived in harmony with the land? Guess again. Then there's Disney's version of Pocahontas. And don't forget Shakespeare's rewriting of Richard III."

Stirling said what they were talking about was fake history masquerading as real: Indians living in harmony with nature, prehistoric matriarchies, prehistoric Tanzanian jets, and so on. Flynn said, "We have two alternate versions of the last four years," to which Stirling added, "Three if you count the little fellow with the big ears."

Flynn said there are three versions of Waterloo taught in three countries: one in which Napoleon lost, one in which Wellington won, and one in which Blucher won. And they are all true. Similarly, when a group of Southern generals were discussing which of them was the reason they lost at Gettysburg, General Pickett said, "I always thought the Yankees had something to do with it."

Someone said that history was not always written by the victors; for example, early European history

was written by the conquered people, who were the ones who had the writing. Stirling said that we often come to the wrong conclusions if we have no written records. (For example, one might conclude from all the statues of Athena that Athens was a matriarchy.) King, who is an anthropologist, said that in general archaeologists have no written records to work from, so history "changes" as they dig up more pieces of the puzzle. The Han Chinese, for example, are finding that archaeology is turning up embarrassing facts about Chinese history. Turtledove said that the Turks have same problem with discoveries attributable to the ancient Greeks in what is now Turkey.

Even if the victors have writing, Turtledove said, they are not always the ones who write the history books. He described reading the Confederate memoirs about why it was always the other person's fault as being "like watching crabs in a bucket."

The panelists were asked what their pet peeves about alternate histories were. Flynn said he was irked by authors making more changes than necessary. Stirling cited "changes having consequences that they probably would not." He gave as an example, Columbus not getting funding so not discovering the New World. If an author uses this to claim that the New World wouldn't have been discovered for (say) two hundred more years, this is inaccurate, since any number of other explorers were poised to find it at just about the same time. And if James Watt hadn't invented the steam engine, someone else would have.

King dislikes "writers with a particular agenda or position that they want to prove a priori." (This sounds like a lot of science fiction other than alternate history-like most of Heinlein.) Turtledove gave as an example of a badly written alternate history *Procurator* by Kirk Mitchell, in which the Roman Empire did not fall because Romans won at Teutoberg Wald, and also because Jesus not crucified. However, two thousand years later, in an industrialized Roman Empire, there are still nine million slaves but they don't work in the factories, and the Balkans had been peaceful for hundreds of years but still had an emperor Constantine. Turtledove attributed all this to a "failure to work out the implications of what you're doing" (It was successful enough to be the first of a trilogy, however.)

Goldstein said authors really have to know their stuff. She said that Turtledove's "Last Article" (about Nazis in India) convinced her but, she added, "Boy, was I depressed!" Turtledove said alternate history gives you a funhouse mirror to look at the world that you can't look at any other way.

Chip Hitchcock asked if the panelists thought that there are point source changes that would have wide-spread effects. Stirling said that Antietam was lost because the battle plans were found (wrapped around a cigar), and read, and believed, and a change in this would most certainly have had a major effect. ("Imagine if he had been a non-smoker," Flynn asked.) For example, Britain had been on the verge of recognizing the Confederacy and didn't only because of the Confederate loss at Antietam. Nielsen Hayden says she considers this evidence of tampering with the timeline.

Someone in the audience asked what effect morphing and public relations "spin doctors" will have on future historians. Nielsen Hayden responded, "Do you think this is new?" Stirling added, "Suetonius was the *People* magazine." And Turtledove said that the historian Procopius left three works: *The History of the Wars*, *The Buildings*, and *The Secret History*. The last was unpublished for years and full of all the dirt on famous people. (This, of course, is not quite the same thing.)

Someone in the audience returned to the question of computer morphing. (It can't be much worse than what painters used to do, although people probably didn't trust paintings as much.) Nielsen Hayden said, "Our ability to record data and our ability to lie runs side by side," and also, "The reason that truth is stranger than fiction is that fiction has to be believable." (Somehow I think this ties in somehow to Bayes' Law.)

Someone in the audience said that Shakespeare's history plays had the same relation to history as movies do today. Someone else asked if public interest in history is declining and hence make it easier to rewrite history. Nielsen Hayden seemed to think so, and seemed surprised at how many

people knew the name of Robert E. Lee's horse. There was a discussion of alternate histories written as history books (e.g., *Invasion: The German Invasion of England, July 1940* by Kenneth Macksey, *For Want of a Nail* by Robert Sobel) which readers think are real history. There is also a rise of esoteric histories: *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln; books about Atlantis, etc. King noted that "pseudo-history is not the same as selective history." Stirling pointed out that the Victorians invented clan tartans—people invent what they need. Nielsen Hayden said that in her collection *Making Book*, she discusses Thomas the Rhymer and the historical sources for him and how few are actually primary. There is a great trend to backdate prophecies, then predict what you want, and attribute them to well-known prophets. This obviously makes for difficulties. As Nielsen Hayden said, "We have enough trouble finding out what happened on Main Street in broad daylight."

Turtledove said that most sagas and epics are like shared universes, and use each other's characters. And Goldstein said, "Crack-pot theories—you have to think of them as fiction." Someone in the audience asked about Afrocentrism and the people who contradict it (for example). King replied, "Public policy doesn't have to make sense." He also said that, just as pseudo-history is not the same as selective history, "Selective history is not the same thing as biased history."

Someone in the audience asked the eternal question: did the panelists subscribe to the Great Man Theory or the Tide of History Theory? Turtledove said that both play a role. While in general, the Tide of History seems the more reliable, Alexander the Great is an example of a point source Great Man. He mentioned in passing that he would like to see a non-Romanized Germany done well, which led the other panelists to list what they wanted to see. (Although I suspect that the other panelists would have given very similar answers to the question.)

Flynn said he would like to see less well-known turning points used. Nielsen recommended the upcoming *Freedom and Necessity* by Steven Brust and Emma Bull, though I foolishly forgot to write down how this tied in.

As far as alternate histories in reality, Nielsen Hayden said, "Mormon culture is full of faith-promoting rumors."

Style Vs. Substance

Saturday, 13:00

Timothy Campbell, David Feintuch, David G. Hartwell, Irene Radford, Kristine Kathryn Rusch, Takayuki Tatsumi

"Is science fiction becoming too concerned about literary style at the expense of storytelling?"

Feintuch began by saying, "Style is pointless without substance." Rusch asked if pretty writing and a good plot are mutually exclusive, and took the position that for a while the genre went too far in the direction of experimental writing. The topic was apparently discussed at Readercon this year (not really a big surprise).

Hartwell claimed, "The majority of the SF readership is ... functionally style-deaf." He wanted authors to avoid pandering to the lazy part of the audience who are style-deaf. Rusch asked him to define style, to which Hartwell replied, "Style is the manner of execution." That is, "style is the manner in which words are placed together in sentences and the manner in which sentences are placed together on the page." And substance, he added, "is what the work is about-'content.'"

Feintuch said that he found that when he returned to science fiction reading after a long hiatus, "An awful lot of stuff I had to re-educate my mind to follow." Radford said that many authors forgot what the story was; it became an essay test rather than a story. Campbell said that the concept of style is often blurred with the concept of voice; a given author's style may change from science fiction to humor, etc., but the voice stays the same. Hartwell said, "We tend to read writers because we become

acclimated to their voices and like it," while Rusch said, "We like to hear them tell a story." Various panelists said that fiction is conversations with people we have never met, or that fiction is lies we use to get to the truth.

Campbell told writers they should write with the voice that is their own. Tatsumi asked, "Doesn't the concept of style contain within it the concept of substance already?" He felt that the New Wave movement was a revolution of style against the domination of substance, where Damon Knight and Judith Merrill pushed for concept of "speculative fiction" with more style. It was very exciting and very confusing for everybody. (Pohl said that he disliked New Wave writing but it challenged him to do different things.)

The next major "movement" was cyberpunk, which declared in Austin in 1984: "We are radical reformers of hard science fiction." But Rusch said they were often too hard to understand: "If the reader can't read your jargon and can't tell what story you're telling, you lose the reader." There was a New Yorker article that said that readers need stories, but Rusch said, "Stories don't have to be all alike."

Hartwell reminded us that it used to be said that science fiction didn't have enough characterization, i.e., did not concern itself with the inner life and motivations of character. Early science fiction stories were concerned with external life and actions. But Rusch said, "As writers went to more and more stylistic things to please the critics, readers left the field." This is, according to her, also why science fiction isn't getting new adolescent readers. (If adolescents used to read the same things adults did, was this because the "adult" books were "written down" to an adolescent level?)

Radford said that while style will attract a reader, it's sympathetic characters and a plot that will keep them. Feintuch, commenting on pleasing the critics, said, "For a hardback to get good reviews it has to be heavy on style," to which an audience member pointed out, "Any story has a style."

Hartwell said, "There has been no attempt to execute a literary work without style though there have been attempts to execute literary works without substance." He gave as examples of high style, low substance *Moonwise* by Greer Gilman and *The Devil Is Dead* by R. A. Lafferty. On the other hand, he claimed, the traditional *Analog* story is the victory of substance over style, to which Rusch responded that *Analog* is not like this any more.

Some said that what people want is "a good read." Hartwell said, "People ignore lousy technique when it's telling them something they want to hear."

Rusch felt that "one of the best stylists in the business is Steven King." Hartwell said, "The science fiction field has an inferiority complex about inflated style and has for decades."

Feintuch said that he thinks that style is too obtrusive when he runs across a "cute phrase" that makes you stop and think about it. (But aren't Shakespeare, Melville, etc., all known for this?)

Hartwell agreed style could go too far: Burroughs "wasn't the ideal of what we were looking for," to which Rusch asked, "Which [Burroughs] we are we talking about?" (Hartwell was referring to William Burroughs.)

Rusch reiterated, "The high end of the field is where the reader who has a lot goes. The low end is where the readers come in."

Someone in the audience claimed "It would be impossible to write *The Female Man* in the style of Robert E. Howard." Someone else said that when writers started writing in a style not suitable for the substance of the story, that's what killed the New Wave.

Feintuch asked Hartwell about Hartwell's statement that most science fiction readers were style-deaf:

"If they can intuit it [differences in style], how can you say they are deaf to it?" Hartwell felt because they couldn't explain the differences, they were deaf to them, but I know the difference between Beethoven and R&B, or Miklos Rozsa and Bernard Herrmann, even if I can't explain it.

Someone felt that a new style was needed for kids who are used to computers and feel that most current science fiction doesn't reflect that. Somewhat off-topic, Feintuch said, "We also have the Psychic Friends Network. We have adopted a willing suspension of disbelief in rational processes."

**Nanotechnology
Saturday, 14:30**

Dr. Robert L. Forward, Kathleen Ann Goonan, Todd J. McCaffrey (m), Wil McCarthy

"Is super-miniaturized science the wave of the future or just another passing fancy?"

Though the panel sounded interesting, I found the first five minutes far too technical for me to follow. (I think there were similar problems in the "Funny Science Research Stories" with people assuming the audience knew what certain chemicals were or did.)

**Do We Need A New Definition Of Literacy?
Saturday, 14:30**

Roger MacBride Allen, Devra M. Langsam, Lydia C. Marano, Willie Siros

"In the next ten years, what will the word 'literacy' mean? Can you truly be literate in tomorrow's society if you can't use a computer? Are computer icons replacing the need to read? What's the future of libraries and bookstores?"

[I missed the first few minutes of this.]

Allen said that we think that everyone is illiterate and we are the elite, but we are just the oddballs off in a corner. For example, all the yuppie parents buying McGuffey Readers think they're getting Aquinas but they're just getting excerpts. And we keep people in school longer to solve the job crisis, rather than to educate them.

Marano said that reading and literacy are something you must have leisure time to do.

Langsam asked whether computer literacy is writing programs or using them? Allen said that regardless, "these words on the page will remain operational long after Pagemaker 6.0 has bit the dust."

But, someone asked, has the level of general comprehension dropped. Allen admitted, "I am basically illiterate, I can't read a newspaper, I can barely puzzle out street signs-in Portuguese. I live in Brazil. The fact that I can write a novel in English really doesn't get me through a check-out line."

Langsam thought the level had dropped and was being catered to be such techniques as having children's classics condensed into 32 pages, or books on tape which are abridged and filed with "real" books in libraries.

Some people claimed government wants a literate populace, but others claimed not. There were a variety of questions regarding paranoia, whether we are the government, etc., which were somewhat off-topic.

An audience member asked whether the poor language, spelling, etc., one sees in electronic communication an artifact of the technology. Marano thought it was because it's fast. Allen said that it was socially acceptable. "It's not quite letter-writing, but it's not being on the phone." Langsam claimed that in media fandom, there's been a steady regression of quality. Marano noted that there are

now more fanzines and more magazines on the Web. Some are only there (i.e., not normally available on paper).

There was the inevitable discussion of electronic books and books on demand, which resembled the "Death of the Book?" panel. Someone said that any replacement for the book must be usable in the "Four Bs": bath, bed, beach, bus. Paper is universally readable, durable, and has a low power consumption.

Langsam says when articles or stories are submitted electronically, the fact that they have already (presumably) been spell-checked and grammar-checked often means that no one does any editing, such as looking for wrong words and so on.

In answer to how we break the cycle of illiteracy at the early stages, someone suggested *giving* (not selling or lending) books to children to own.

Is The Scientific Method The Death Of God?

Saturday, 16:00

John Collin Attwood, Stephen Baxter, DJ Byrne, Howard Davidson, Bradford Lyau (m)

"What more needs be said to describe this panel?"

Attwood began by saying, "The purpose of doing science is to find out the truth about things." In other words, the idea is to prove ideas true. Religion is different. If people applied the same rigor, they would see there is no God, but people don't do this. Lyau disagreed, saying that Isaac Newton was attacked on his theory of gravity by Leibnitz because, Leibnitz asked, "How can you prove gravity? It seems more like magic." Newton responded through Samuel Chapman that he didn't know the nature of gravity but that things would fall at a certain rate, whether done by God or cosmic goo. (Or something to that effect. I doubt Newton used the term "cosmic goo.")

Baxter also disagreed, at least to the popular mind, saying God was at his most vulnerable when Galileo looked through his telescope at the moon and saw mountains and seas (though perhaps even more now that we've now reached the moon). "Science does not give you answers about why things feel the way they do." Science delivers fantastic experiences, but they feel banal. So religion is flourishing, some aspects even based on such "scientific discoveries" as the face on Mars.

Davidson claimed that scientists are not trying to find truth, but rather models to describe how the universe operates. These models must be repeatable by other investigators. You never get truth, but you get better and better descriptions at the boundaries. Old theories are not obliterated, but they are subject to growth. "Religion for a long time was another way of looking at the universe," he said. But "questions get taken away from religion over time." As an example of this, he talked about theories of disease, which used to be based on religion but have (for most people) been moved into the realm of science. He even thinks that neuroscience may give us an explanation of why we want to believe in God, and added, "The amount of the universe that is considered to be uninvestigatable is getting smaller."

Byrne gave the answer, "Maybe" (for balance, he said). He also felt we should at least define our terms. The scientific method consists of a hypothesis and a set of experiments to try to disprove it. If they fail, the hypothesis is "accepted." We also need to define God. Most of the panelists, he said, seem to be discussing the death of religion. Obviously, if God is omnipotent we can't kill him. (I think this is perhaps too literal a reading of the question.) "Why do things fall?" he asked. They just do: gravity explains how, but not why. As we enlarge the sphere of knowledge we also enlarge the boundary which is what we don't know. "The more things we know, the more things we know that we don't know." And reiterating, he said that science will answer how, but doesn't even attempt to answer why or who. God and religion are in part because "you want something to believe in and you don't want it to change."

Baxter said, "We are blessed with the rational end of the scientific community here on the panel." There is no Stephen Hawking or Frank Tipler, who say that science has all the answers. Baxter also observed (accurately, I suspect), "Hawking is not a scientist in the public view; he's a wounded god."

Attwood said that questions like "why did this happen?" are disappearing (because they are being answered), and they are what started religions and a belief in God. (This seems in contradiction to Byrne's claims earlier.)

An audience member asked whether if one considers Vernor Vinge's Singularity (a state in which anything we want to do we can do; anything we want to know we can know). "Is the scientific method the birth of God?" Baxter replied that he doesn't believe in the Singularity. He mentioned that Greg Bear in *Eon* has a religion in which you worship your far-future descendants, and he doesn't see the scientific trends as all upward. "We're better at building things than at running them," he noted, mentioning Chernobyl and other operational failures. Davidson asked what happens if you can build life, in particular sentient beings? What happens when these are everyday occurrences rather than one-time events?

Attwood claimed that we know exactly how things work, because people working in fields now exactly what they've done, but Byrne disagreed, saying, "The scope of what we're trying to do is far greater than we can fit in our minds." Later he added, "Even though we build a system we don't understand it."

Someone in the audience asked, "Is there more than one scientific method?" Davidson said that what is taught as the scientific method is so abstract as to bear little resemblance to what is actually done: "It is constantly, repeatedly, determinedly checked against the physical universe." Baxter said that in spite of all this, "We're monkeys stuck here in the dark, telling stories to each other." Davidson said that while not all theories are "testable" in a literal sense (we can't repeat the Big Bang or build dinosaurs), we need to explain the trails they leave.

GHOST IN THE SHELL **Saturday, 16:50**

This was the only film I got to (well, it was actually shown on video), and it was a good opportunity to see a well-received anime, though I do find it harder to distinguish the characters than if they were live actors.

The L.A.con III Masquerade **Saturday, 19:30**

"The traditional presentations of costumes past, present and future...the fashions of yesteryear, the mimicry of today's dreams, and the extrapolation of things to come. There is perhaps no larger event at the World Science Fiction Convention than its centerpiece, the great Masquerade, and this year's gala by professional and amateur costumers will be no exception. Lines will form early for the presentation, which will be followed by half-time activities before the final judging results are announced. Come spend your evening with the traditional Saturday night costume extravaganza."

The Masquerade consisted of about forty costumes, a good number. Everything went smoothly, and there were several excellent costumes without any real groaners. I will not attempt to review or even describe them here; there are enough Web sites with pictures that it would be foolish to spend a lot of time trying to do it justice in words.

Parties

The only party I got to was the Boston in 2001. Using the lanai in the Hilton worked well, but the floor layout made it very difficult to find some of the rooms.

Reading: James Morrow
Sunday, 11:30
James Morrow

What better way to spend a Sunday morning than listening to a reading from a book about putting God on trial?

Morrow read from *Blameless in Abaddon*, the sequel to *Towing Jehovah*. He described the corpse in that book as sort of a Rorschach test, and said that now that *Blameless in Abaddon* was finished, he was working on the third book, titled *The Eternal Footman*.

In *Blameless in Abaddon*, Justice of the Peace Martin Candle hears there is neural activity in God's brain and decides to bring this most infamous criminal to justice. This is part of the age-old attempt to find an answer to mystery of suffering, and in the book (which I will review elsewhere), it is clear that Morrow has done his homework in researching the theologians who have attempted to answer this question. (At least from a Jewish or Christian perspective—one might argue that finding "Jehovah" means one needn't look at Buddhist or Hindu explanations, but a few Islamic sources might have been nice. On the other hand, it's unlikely the characters involved would have access to or inclination to look for these.) The person defending Jehovah is based on C. S. Lewis, and the story also involves Scrabble-playing dinosaurs. (As Morrow quotes from Dostoyevsky, "If everything on Earth were rational, nothing would happen.") We also find out that God is a Platonist.

Morrow enjoys writing this sort of work in the genre, because "science fiction makes very literal what in other fiction is metaphorical." He added that it might be nice if people took these things more seriously here (not "it's just a novel"), but on the other hand, he appreciated being able to write a novel such as this without having to go into hiding as Salman Rushdie did.

Gender Roles: What Makes A Tiptree Award Winner
Sunday, 13:00
Susan T. Casper, Elizabeth Hand, Pat Murphy, Spike Parsons (m)

"Past judges of the James Tiptree Jr. Memorial Award discuss recent works dealing with gender issues. Who does it well and who's really 'out there?'"

This was really more a panel on how the Tiptree Award was created and how it is administered, rather than what makes a Tiptree Award winner.

It began in a car drive back from a convention when Pat Murphy noted with some friends that there was no award named for a woman or focused on (as she put it) "things we were interested in." Well, I thought I was interested in good science fiction, which is what I hope the Hugo Award is focused on. In fact, there are few awards focused on a sub-aspect of science fiction or fantasy that I can think of at all (the Tiptree Award, the Prometheus Award, and the newly-created Sidewise Award are all that come immediately to mind). As for the former, maybe someone should create an award named after Mary Shelley—maybe for best genetic engineering story?

Anyway, Karen Joy Fowler suggested the name. Someone said that to have an award taken seriously, you need money. Fowler suggested funding it with bake sales, and this caught on. It has been awarded for five years now, and the judges are currently reading for 1996; the panelists asked for suggestions. (Suggestions should be sent to Tiptree Award c/o SF3, Box 1624, Madison WI 53707; Karen Fowler, 457 Russell Boulevard, Davis CA 95616; or Pat Murphy, jaxxx@exploratorium.edu.) Each year there are five judges selected by Murphy and Fowler: these include a past winner, a non-writer (such as an editor, a publisher, or so forth), and three other writers. There are usually four women and a man. (Someone commented that most other five-person juries seem to be four men and a woman.)

Casper talked a bit about what "gender roles" means. She said there were some problematic cases (at

least theoretically). For example, what about a story that expands gender roles but is incredibly sexist? What about a story that explores gender roles well but not in any way originally? Later, Murphy said that even books that make the judges uncomfortable may belong on the list, and Casper said, "It's really not a politically correct award." Perhaps not, though the list seems to read that way.

Procedurally, the panelists theoretically begin by reading all the fiction that comes out in a year, but in practice jury screens for each other. (This is standard to all awards, I suspect, since not everyone can track down everything.) Nominations are particularly important for small press items that the jurors might not otherwise hear about. Hand said that when she was writing her book, she knew the award existed, and she made sure her publisher submitted it. Casper said, "It is an unfortunate byproduct of the system that a novel will outweigh a short story" (although Ursula K. LeGuin did win for a novella). As she said, "It's like having a light bulb compete with a light show."

Murphy observed that ten years ago, a strong woman character or a strong lesbian character would have been enough, but now the bar is higher. Casper said that she knew Alice Sheldon (James Tiptree's real name) and Sheldon would have been mystified, because she felt you should expand gender roles in your life, not in fiction.

Regarding the whole bake sale issue, Murphy said, "I'm not a bake sale sort of person, but for the Tiptree Award I've been bakin' brownies and I'm sewing a quilt square." She noted that those things are okay too: "It's sort of reclaiming the bake sale." Someone else said, "Making it our own," and Murphy came back with, "Embrace the bake sale."

The award used to include a chocolate typewriter, which LeGuin praised, saying "I don't want to seem ungrateful but I have received awards that would have been better eaten than displayed." (Murphy talked about her Lovecraft bust that was the World Fantasy Award, which she thought particularly inartistic and so found various outfits to dress it in for the various seasons and holidays.) It now just a chocolate plaque because the chocolate typewriter company went out of business. (I'm sure I've seen chocolate computers, but that may be too techie.)

Murphy said that each year they announce a winner and a short list of recommended list, rather than having four "losers" (this at the suggestion of Vonda McIntyre).

One of this year's co-winners, Theodore Roszak, was not in the science fiction field and so had not heard of the award before. As it was explained to him, he was just astounded by the whole thing (particularly the bake sale part), but he did seem to be pleased to receive it and quite taken by the whole idea.

I asked why only one man has won the award. Casper responded that it tends to be a look at how women's roles will change, and men often don't write about that, since they are afraid of being perceived as sexist. Also, she felt that women more aware of the problems. Hand (jokingly, I think) mused, "Maybe the men aren't writing anything good; I don't know." Someone noted that men do make the short list (for example, Paul Park's *Celestis*.)

In addition to the contact addresses given above, the Tiptree Award has a Web site which has a list of winners and recommended books (<http://www.cs.wisc.edu/wiscon/tiptree/intro.html>). Previous winners are:

- | 1992 Gwyneth Jones, *White Queen*
- | 1992 Eleanor Arnason, *A Woman of the Iron People*
- | 1993 Maureen McHugh, *China Mountain Zhang*
- | 1994 Nicola Griffith, *Ammonite*
- | 1995 Ursula K. LeGuin, "The Matter of Seggri"
- | 1995 Nancy Springer, *Larque on the Wing*
- | 1996 Elizabeth Hand, *Waking the Moon*

- | 1996 Theodore Roszak, *The Memoirs of Elizabeth Frankenstein*

Retroactive awards are:

- | Suzy McKee Charnas, *Motherlines*, *Walk to the End of the World*, *The Furies*
- | Ursula K. LeGuin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*
- | Joanna Russ, *When It Changed* and *The Female Man*

James White Reception Sunday, 15:00

I dropped into the Fan Lounge for the James White reception (and book launching), which was quite well-attended. It also had very good food, including sushi, smoked turkey, and other real food. Afterwards I stopped in the Internet Lounge and checked my email-nothing urgent enough to warrant spending time on (luckily).

Life on Mars Sunday, 16:00 ???

This was a last-minute addition, and I suspect they forgot to tell the panelists, because apparently no one showed up.

Why Is Fandom So White? Sunday, 16:00 Fred Duarte, Kenne Estes, John Hertz (m), Bradford Lyau, Ken Porter

"An exploration of minorities in Science Fiction Fandom and why there aren't more of them."

For what it's worth, a count I took early on showed an audience of thirteen whites/Hispanics, six blacks, and no Asians.

Porter started by saying that he felt white America didn't understand him until he read *Citizen of the Galaxy* and realized that Heinlein did understand him. He seemed to interpret this panel as "why are there so few blacks?" rather than talking about other minorities as well.

Duarte said, "I think Craig [Miller] needed a token Hispanic on this panel," and noted, "Unlike the black characters that have evolved over the past few years, I don't see too many Hispanics."

Lyau said that this was his twenty-first Worldcon. He wished there were some females on the panel for balance. Although he is Chinese-American, he is also descended from Von Ralke (a German philosopher), and is a college professor and modern European historian.

Hertz generalized the panel by saying, "Persons other than white men are statistically underrepresented in fandom." But he did note that the proportion of women has been rising. He also said that, contrary to popular belief, women came to Worldcon in large numbers the year *before* the premiere of *Star Trek*. There are still few blacks and Hispanics, but slightly more Asians. There are also, he observed, very few orthodox believers (of any faith), very few "suit-and-tie" types who don't say they hate it, very few ordinary Republicans or Democrats, and very few members of labor unions who like being in labor unions.

Lyau said that he taught in Albania, where all the images are either white or stereotypes ("All Asians are kung-fu artists"). Even in the United States the media presents white images from northwest European culture. We come to science fiction conventions as reaction against mundane society, but are shaped by it nonetheless, he said, and that the reason that fandom is white is that the mundane

world is white. As Hertz commented, "We fans are much more mundane than we notice." As David Brin said once, "You never notice propaganda than agrees with you."

Duarte said that one problem was that "the way that most people sort of stumbled into fandom was by way of reading. For a lot of Hispanic kids, being able to read is a big deal." A lot of children have trouble dealing with standard stuff and will have even more problems with specialized sub-genres. Hertz claimed this was because Hispanic and black African cultures are aural rather than written. On the other hand, he said, Jews have a reading and writing culture and so are over-represented. (So do Asians, but they don't seem to be over-represented.) Lyau said that contrary to Hertz's theory, there *is* an African and Black American literary tradition. Estes agreed, but added, "Black literary tradition wants something worthy, while science fiction is escapist."

Porter said that blacks will always be "outside." Asians are outside also, he said, but are perceived to be smart. On the other hand, "'Uppity n-----s' got pulled back" by other blacks afraid of their being noticed. However, someone in the audience said that for blacks in the northeast what Porter said doesn't follow. (There also used to be a "don't stand out" tradition in the American Jewish experience which has changed.)

Even so, there is something of a feedback loop here (or a non-feedback loop, perhaps): black people say, "I don't see enough black faces; I won't get involved." Estes said, "There are more blacks in the other kinds of fandom" (World Fantasy Convention, X-Files fandom, Comicon, and so on). Comic conventions are far more heavily black. At Trek cons, you see Siskos and Geordis walking around.

A big problem is that science fiction fans pride themselves on being outsiders and unusual. As one panelist said, "If you're black, you don't want to *join* a minority."

Another disorienting fact, Porter said, is that "[science fiction fans] treat you just as you are. We as blacks expect to be treated differently. We're waiting for the other foot to fall." Later he added, "You walk in the door, you're treated as a person. Color of skin doesn't matter." He thinks this may eventually overcome the other problems.

Someone in the audience felt that there was a "huge class dynamic" going on here. For example, Irish and French rural cultures also had an aural rather than a written tradition. Hertz agreed in part, saying, "There are very few extremely rich people in fandom. We also have few people of the conventional poor."

An audience member mentioned that some science fiction groups in the South have only recently dropped the Confederate flag as part of their symbols. This was attributed to a "perverse identification and pride in being on the losing side." Although many claim this symbol has no racial connotation, it still makes blacks uncomfortable. (When I saw swastikas in India, I *knew* they had no Nazi connotation, and they *still* gave me an uncomfortable feeling.)

Someone asked why, if there are blacks in media fandom, there are not more black fans at a Worldcon. The panelists didn't answer this, except by implication that Worldcons may seem too literary as opposed to the 100% media conventions. Duarte said that the downside to media fandom is that it's a lot easier or faster to see a movie than read a book. Hertz disagreed, saying, "The reason I don't have a television is that it's too hard to watch television" (since it requires you set aside a fixed block of time at its convenience). (Has he never heard of VCRs?) Someone in the audience said that movies provide a shared experience that books don't. On the other hand, books provide more hours per dollar.

There was a long digression on role models, in which one person observed that Michael Jordan is real, but Captain Sisko is fantasy, and blacks want reality. They know they can't command a starship, but they might be able to play basketball.

Someone said that blacks trying to "grow" often get asked, "Are you trying to be white?" "The intellectual end of things in the black community has never been explored [the way sports has]." In fact, Porter claims that the intellect is still not put in high regard in the black community.

Porter said that black men have a hard time with intimacy, so blacks have a hard time in fandom with the intimacy of fandom (group hugs, group massages).

The panelists felt, however, that this was the era of Black First Fandom. And Lyau said, "There are too many exceptions to make the generalizations worthwhile."

Why Is Science Fiction So White?

Sunday, 17:30

Steven Barnes, Cecilia Tan, J. Cameron Todd, William F. Wu, Doselle Young (m)

"An exploration of minorities in Science Fiction, both among the writers and their characters."

Barnes began by saying, "I promised myself I was never going to do another one of these panels." But he didn't realize unless he specifically said not to put him on this panel, he would be put on it. Todd said that he was on the panel because "I am black and I'm going to die that way. I can't write any other way." Wu said he could relate to the white characters he saw when he was growing up but not the Asian characters because they were unrealistic. He also said, "I don't see a responsibility to handle racial or ethnic issues but I made a choice to." Wu also wanted to see Asian-American characters dealing with universal subjects as well as books about racial issues in particular. Young wrote the chapter in *Editors on Editing* titled "Editing Fiction: The Question of Political Correctness." Tan said, "My feeling is that science fiction is not as white as it used to be."

Barnes said that when he was growing up, he was trying to find the answer to "What is it to be a man?" so he read Edgar Rice Burroughs and Robert E. Howard. On the whole he found them readable, but every once in a while he would run across a line like "White men have imagination, black men have little, animals have none" (Burroughs). And he did notice that there were "no brothers saved in *When Worlds Collide*, even though they saved the dog." He said that people say science fiction is the mythology of the 20th century and everyone's mythology says, "We are the children of God." In fact, there are more images of aliens, robots, and animals, than of minorities. "Where are the other people who inhabit this planet?" And when he goes to films, his friends ask him afterward, "How did they kill the n-----r this time?" (He said that Paul Winfield died all the time.) (I would mention at least one film in which the black man doesn't die, and in fact gets the (white) woman: *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*.) Barnes did like *Independence Day*, not for the science fiction aspects, but just because Will Smith was the hero and got to survive. But he said, "In forty years of network TV, there has never been a successful drama series with a non-Caucasian lead." The closest thing to a successful Asian-American star is Keanu Reeves, and the only female Asian-American stars are Tia Carrerra, Joan Chen, and Rosalind Chao. And the first movie to treat Asian-Americans well was *Dragon*. Wu pointed out that Asians are still waiting for a role comparable to that of Will Smith in *Independence Day*. Asian roles that do exist are not only non-heroic, but are also mostly non-sexual.

Barnes talked about his book *Street Lethal*, for which the cover artist painted a white man instead of the black hero. Someone in the audience asked, "They put a white guy on the cover? Are you serious?" to which Barnes replied, "I'm serious as cancer." The reason, of course, is that the publishers figured white people wouldn't buy a book with a black man on the cover. Young quoted Walter Mosley as having said, "The general consensus is that white people don't like to read about black people, black women don't like to read about black men, and black men don't read."

Young said that he had read comic books because he had no bookstores or library nearby, and didn't see Superman as white—he saw him as alien. In him, he felt "that sense of otherness, that we are other." But he saw parallels to the treatment of blacks in other characters as well: "What if my Dad

was Kato? He'd tell Green Hornet to get his own damn keys."

On seeing black characters in science fiction, Young said, "It's probably good to be less deliberate about it." In fact the Milestone Line is so deliberate he feels alienated by it. Tan said her interest was more on alternative family structures, but she wasn't surprised that it was authors like Octavia Butler and Samuel R. Delany are among those who have dealt most with alternate family structures. As Tan said, "What drew me to science fiction was the embracing of the other." She said she noticed early on that what gave Spock insights was that he was half human, half Vulcan, but not all of either. Also, Tan noted, if you can accept wild space aliens, it's not so hard to accept someone from your own planet.

Barnes said that for years he was only male black heterosexual science fiction writer in the world. (I don't think this is entirely true-what about Charles Saunders, although he did write more fantasy-type stories?)

Barnes was a very good speaker and quite frank (one thing he said was, "If Africans had taken Europe the way Europeans took Africa, we would not have treated you any better"). This undoubtedly why the Committee put him on the panel, and kudos to them-and him, of course.

Barnes said when he was wondering about whether he would have commercial difficulties writing about black characters, someone asked him, "Why do you want to write novels for the pleasure of people you wouldn't even have in your home?"

I was curious whether the authors were more inspired by black authors (regardless of genre) or by science fiction authors (regardless of race). Todd listed Isaac Asimov, Frank Herbert, and Anne McCaffrey; Wu listed Robert A. Heinlein (saying he was condescending to various ethnic groups, but he did put them in), Edward Eager, and Harlan Ellison; Young listed Michael Moorcock, Harlan Ellison, and Vladimir Nabakov; Barnes listed Robert A. Heinlein, Harlan Ellison, Robert E. Howard, Arthur C. Clarke; Tan listed Roger Zelazny, Samuel R. Delany (for his incredible cultural diversity), and Marion Zimmer Bradley. In other words, their inspirations are science fiction authors, not black authors, Asian authors, Hispanic authors, and so on.

The panelists mentioned that Gary Bowen is working on *De Coloris*, a bibliography of "people of color," and people with suggestions for inclusion should send email to fcowboy@netgsi.com.

The Hugo Awards Ceremony
Sunday, 20:00
Connie Willis

"The annual presentation of the Hugo Awards, the highest honors recognized in the world of Science Fiction and Fantasy literature, media and fandom, is one of the centerpieces of the World Science Fiction Convention. This year promises to be no exception. Join Worldcon Toastmistress Connie Willis and a cross-section of science fiction and fantasy fandom for one of the major functions of the weekend ... with awards presented including best novels, novellas and short stories, fanzines and prozines, fan writer and artist, and the hotly-contested Best Dramatic Presentation. Also to be awarded: the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer, plus the First Fandom Award and others. Lines will form in the Convention Center early. A list of this year's nominees is presented in your souvenir program book."

And the winners are:

- | **BEST NOVEL:** *The Diamond Age*, by Neal Stephenson (Bantam)
- | **BEST NOVELLA:** "The Death of Captain Future," by Allen Steele (ASIMOV'S, October 1995)

- | **BEST NOVELETTE:** "Think Like a Dinosaur," by James Kelly (ASIMOV'S, June 1995)
- | **BEST SHORT STORY:** "The Lincoln Train," by Maureen F. McHugh (FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION, April 1995)
- | **BEST NON-FICTION BOOK:** *Science Fiction: The Illustrated Encyclopedia*, by John Clute (Dorling Kindersley)
- | **BEST DRAMATIC PRESENTATION:** "The Coming of Shadows" (BABYLON 5) (Warner Brothers) J. Michael Straczynski, Douglas Netter, John Copeland, producers; J. Michael Straczynski, screenplay; Janet Greek, director
- | **BEST PROFESSIONAL EDITOR:** Gardner Dozois
- | **BEST PROFESSIONAL ARTIST:** Bob Eggleton
- | **BEST ORIGINAL ARTWORK:** *Dinotopia: The World Beneath*, by James Gurney (Turner)
- | **BEST SEMI-PROZINE:** *Locus*, edited by Charles N. Brown
- | **BEST FANZINE:** *Ansible*, edited by Dave Langford
- | **BEST FAN WRITER:** Dave Langford
- | **BEST FAN ARTIST:** William Rotsler
- | **JOHN W. CAMPBELL AWARD** For Best New Science Fiction Writer, sponsored by Dell Magazines: David Feintuch (2nd year of eligibility)

Interesting factoid: This is the first time in twelve years that all the Hugo-winning fiction authors were first-time winners. Even more interesting: The last time this happened was at L.A.con II. There's something about L.A.cons that swims against the tide....

There were complaints about the length of the ceremony this year (almost two and a half hours). There were a couple of reasons for this. One was that several non-Hugos were awarded at this ceremony ("First Fandom" awards to Earl Melvin Korshack and Frank K. Kelly, the Big Heart award to Dick Daniels, and the Seiun Awards to Dan Simmons's *Fall of Hyperion*, Stephen Baxter's *Timelike Infinity*, and Isaac Asimov's "Robot Dreams," and a special committee award to William Rotsler). (At the Retro-Hugo ceremonies, special committee awards were also given to Forrest J. Ackerman, Walter J. Daughtery, and A. E. Van Vogt.) And the presentations for these other awards were not always brief. (In particular, I heard people talking afterward about how long the Seiun presentations went.)

In addition, there was also a tribute to Elsie Wollheim, delivered by Robert Silverberg, who talked about her contributions and his association and friendship with her.

And finally, there was a "doubling up" of introductory material. Normally, the Toastmaster tells anecdotes, and provides general humorous and historical "schtick" to the ceremony. And Connie Willis did this, with a list of additional Hugos that she wanted to award. But there were also taped anecdotes of humorous stories about people's experience with their Hugo Awards (taking them through airport security, people who thought they were sold in the Dealers Room, etc.). One or the other would have been enough, and frankly, if you're going to ask someone known for their humor as a Hugo presenter to be the Toastmaster you should expect that they will be doing the schtick.

Some of Willis's "non-Hugos" were pretty funny: "Trilogy with the Most Volumes," "Best Evidence of Life on Another Planet" (given to ALH84001) "Best Evidence of Intelligence on This Planet" (given to "No Award"), and "Utter Disregard of Science." The nominees for the latter were *Star Trek: Deep Space 9* (for totaling ignoring the Law of Conservation of Mass in Odo's transformations), *The X-Files* (I forget what the specific item was here), *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (for having a replicator which is incapable for producing anything except Earl Grey Tea-hot), *Baywatch* (for totaling ignoring the Law of Gravity), *Independence Day* (for everything). And the winner was ... the O. J. Simpson jury.

At least there were no real technical glitches. (There was no list of Campbell nominees for Stanley Schmidt to read from, but someone quickly provided one from the program.)

The biggest audience reaction was to the announcement of *Babylon 5's* "Coming of Shadows" as the winner for Dramatic Presentation. Normally, this would have been shown right after the ceremony, but apparently the Committee could not get permission from Warner Brothers. (This seems a bit strange for a broadcast television show that everyone there already had on tape, but maybe they thought that, having been made for the small screen, it would suffer on the large screen.)

Parties

I went to the Hugo Nominees Party afterward. Well, it was called the Hugo Nominees Party, but it seemed to be for just about anyone who came along. For starters, when Mark and I arrived, we were told I was the first nominee to show up, but the room was already almost full. Pretty soon it was almost impossible to move at all, so they did open the door onto the lanai, but this just meant people drifted in through that door as well. I find that fewer and fewer Hugo nominees go to these parties each year, perhaps because it seems no different than any other party. Am I arguing for a strict exclusionary rule? Well, yes, I suppose I am. If anyone who is a member of SFFWA or is a Program Participant or is on the Committee or Staff can come in, a *much* bigger room is needed and it should be called something else. I mean, the people throwing the party (traditionally the next year's Worldcon committee) are free to do what they please, but calling it a "Hugo Nominees Party" when there are more other people than nominees (or even nominees plus significant others) seems deceptive.

Also, I'm assuming the party was sponsored by LoneStarCon 2, since the "souvenir" was a cowboy boot drinking glass, but the printing on the boot mentioned L.A.con III, not LoneStarCon 2. (All other years, the name of the party-sponsoring convention was on the souvenir, not just that of the nominating convention.) This is not a complaint, just an observation of something out of the usual.

I also chatted a bit with other people who were surprised that some of the Hugo nominees had not been invited to be on panels. There was certainly no lack of panelists, and I for one was not offended by any means at not being asked (it eliminated any conflicts that might have caused, for example), but I was surprised. And when you have people from Europe traveling to California, it makes sense to give preference to them, since this may be the only chance West Coast fans will have to see them. Also, the programming scheduling gets underway before the Hugo nominees are known, so they have no list to work from when they're working on it.

Images of Mars Monday, 10:00 Stephen Baxter

"As one of our closest neighbors, Mars has long filled man's imagination. Our ideas of what we'd find there have changed greatly over the years, both in science and in science fiction. Listen to passages from literature and science and discover how our images of Mars have changed over the years. And, with the possible discovery of a fossil record, how our image of Mars may change again."

When it comes to Mars, Baxter said, "All the images are mental." and what he talked about were the various mental images we have had over the years. He began by saying that the announcement of past life on Mars was frightening in the sense that "if it's wrong, it will be so disappointing." And the *Weekly World News* and *Weekly Sun* were somewhat confused, since one of their mainstays was now appearing in the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*-and everywhere else. "That kind of reaction is entirely predictable," said Baxter, because we have always been fascinated by the idea of life on Mars.

Baxter said there are three aspects of Mars: the reality of Mars, models and paradigms of Mars, and the science fiction view of Mars. "Mars is the only planet whose surface you can see from the Earth with a telescope (apart from the dead moon)," Baxter reminded us. Galileo was the first to observe it through a telescope; Christiaan Huygens made the first map of it. Cassini in 1666 spotted the polar caps, in 1837 the "wave of darkening" was detected, and in 1877 the two moons were discovered. "Canali" (channels) were noted in the 1860s, and later in 1877, and Percival Lowell, mistranslating the word to "canals," launched into wild speculation about them in 1895.

The result was the popular view of intelligent Martians, etc., which Baxter termed "Barsoomian Mars." But before Edgar Rice Burroughs or even before H. G. Wells, authors wrote about Mars: *The Plunge Into Space* by Robert Cromie (1891), for example. In 1897 Wells wrote "The Crystal Egg," followed by *The War of the Worlds* in 1898, with one of the most famous openings in science fiction literature:

"No one would have believed in the last years of the nineteenth century that this world was being watched keenly and closely by intelligences greater than man's and yet as mortal as his own; that as men busied themselves about their various concerns they were scrutinised and studied, perhaps almost as narrowly as a man with a microscope might scrutinise the transient creatures that swarm and multiply in a drop of water. With infinite complacency men went to and fro over this globe about their little affairs, serene in their assurance of their empire over matter. It is possible that the infusoria under the microscope do the same. No one gave a thought to the older worlds of space as sources of human danger, or thought of them only to dismiss the idea of life upon them as impossible or improbable. It is curious to recall some of the mental habits of those departed days. At most terrestrial men fancied there might be other men upon Mars, perhaps inferior to themselves and ready to welcome a missionary enterprise. Yet across the gulf of space, minds that are to our minds as ours are to those of the beasts that perish, intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic, regarded this earth with envious eyes, and slowly and surely drew their plans against us. And early in the twentieth century came the great disillusionment."

Baxter pointed out that Wells was tapping into mythic seams and at the same time attacking imperialism, which made the 1938 Mercury Theater broadcast of it (by Orson Welles) especially fitting. It created a panic, as did a 1949 broadcast in Quito, Ecuador: when the listeners discovered they had been deceived by the station, they set fire to it.

This version also showed up in films, from *The War of the Worlds* in 1953 through *Independence Day* this year. There was even a *War of the Worlds* television series in the 1980s.

Wells not only provided general influence, but also spawned some direct descendants. An early one was *Edison's Conquest of Mars* by Garrett P. Serviss in 1898. Most recently, this year Kevin Anderson collected many variations of the Martian invasion in *War of the Worlds: Global Dispatches*. Baxter said that many of these were more "realistic" looks at the invasion. Howard Waldrop's "Night of the Cooters," for example, points out that these days the Martians would be easy to beat.

In 1912 Edgar Rice Burroughs wrote *A Princess of Mars*, which he later followed with ten others over a long period of time. Baxter described it as "gorgeous, entertaining, [and] totally daft." There were

also other films, such as *Invaders from Mars* (1953) and *Red Planet Mars* (1952), which Baxter called "really pretty awful."

But scientists made progress, and discovered that Mars was too cold for water, so the ice caps must be carbon dioxide. Even though we have used cameras on Mars, drawings still better sources than cameras. And more accurate viewings showed that the canali were really just dots and patches mentally joined together. When this was realized, scientists also realized something else that should have tipped them off to this: Lowell's canals were wrong because of perspective. Mars is actually a globe, so canals would have followed "great circles" and not have appeared as straight lines. But old ideas die hard, and given a model of Mars being on a band with Earth at one end, moon at another, we tend to pick the Earth end.

By mid-century we had "arid Mars": cold, with a sparse atmosphere and little water, but some very sturdy life. This image gave us "A Martian Odyssey" by Stanley G. Weinbaum (1934), with its thin but breathable air, where all you have to worry about is frostbite, and *The Sands of Mars* by Arthur C. Clarke (1967), with breathing masks and primitive life, and turning Phobos into a fusion reactor. This latter was a common theme: "independence by terraforming." We see it also in *The Martian Way* by Isaac Asimov (1952) and Kim Stanley Robinson's "Mars" series. In the movies, we have *Total Recall* (1990).

John W. Campbell tried to discipline Barsoom out of his authors, but failed. We still got *Shadow over Mars* (a.k.a. *The Nemesis from Terra*) (1951) and *People of the Talisman* (1964) by Leigh Brackett. (The former was followed by *The Sword of Rhiannon* (1953) and *The Coming of the Terrans* (1967); the latter is the sequel to *The Secret of Sinharat* (1964).) There was also *The Martian Chronicles* by Ray Bradbury (1950). This image continued through *The Space Machine* by Christopher Priest (1975), *Desolation Road* by Ian MacDonald (1988), *Dream Park II: The Barsoom Project* by Steve Barnes and Larry Niven (1989), and *Take Back Plenty* by Colin Greenland (1990).

And this arid Mars is still the scientific model. Werner Von Braun wrote *The Mars Project* in 1953. There was the film *The Conquest of Space* (1955), which Baxter described as "a pretty terrible film" but having good special effects sequences showing how Von Braun's plan might have worked. Baxter himself has a novel dealing with this coming out later this year (*Voyage*). There was also the film *Capricorn One* (1967) and novels as diverse as *Two Planets* by Kurt Lasswitz (1897), *The Three Stigmata Of Palmer Eldritch* (1964) and *Martian Time-Slip* (1964) by Philip K. Dick (which use arid Mars as a backdrop and a symbol), *Voyage To The Red Planet* by Terry Bisson (1990), and all the Robert A. Heinlein's Martian stories: *Red Planet* (1949), *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961), and *Podkayne of Mars* (1963). *Stranger in a Strange Land* is really a new sort of Martian invasion—a benign one. (Another type of Martian invasion can be found in the film *Five Million Years to Earth/Quatermass & the Pit* (1968).) Even *Out of the Silent Planet* by C. S. Lewis (1938) falls into this category.

In 1964 the Mariner 4 mission found what Baxter called "Viking Mars," with craters rather than the canals they expected, or as he put it, "a million dreams dying with sixteen grainy photographs." The wave of darkening seemed to be clouds and evaporation rather than vegetation. The air was not even as thick as at twice the height of Mt. Everest, but more like space. And probes failed to turn up even as many organic molecules as expected—which wasn't very many. The result of this disillusionment was that the "flood of science fiction about Mars which had been going on for nearly a century dried up." There were still a few isolated works such as Frederik Pohl's *Man Plus* (1976). But it wasn't until the 1990s that the genre recovered with a whole new wave of Mars novels: *Martian Rainbow* by Robert L. Forward (1991), *The Mechanical Sky* by Donald Moffitt (1991), *Beachhead* by Jack Williamson (1992), *Mars* by Ben Bova (1992), and *Moving Mars* by Greg Bear (1993).

But Viking Mars is too dull for most fiction, even with the whole "Face on Mars" syndrome. There was an *X-Files* space episode, and *The Labyrinth of Night* by Allen Steele (1992). But Baxter feels that "Viking Mars has its own grandeur," and Kim Stanley Robinson captures some of that in his

"Mars" trilogy. Baxter particularly prefers the first book with its evocation of the native Mars to the feeling of loss due to terraforming he gets from the later books. Other recommendations included *Red Dust* (1993) and *Fairyland* (1995) by Paul J. McAuley, and "The Message from Mars" by J. G. Ballard (in the April 1992 *Interzone*).

As Baxter said, "We're standing on the ruins of a divine series of paradigms. Viking Mars is not the truth; it's just another model." But he has faith in "our ability to construct these beautiful, compelling, cozy, and totally wrong narratives to explain the universe." For example, any reasonable terraforming plan would take a thousand years, but it's more exciting in a story if it happens faster.

People asked whether ALH84001 will generate more stories (almost definitely, incorporating the whole idea of panspermia). Some people think that if we find life on Mars, we should take a hands-off approach rather than saying we'll just add more life to the mix. There is even the "rocks have rights" movement. As Baxter said, "The universe is not there for us to pave over." He said that he had been sightseeing in the United States on this trip and "it would be criminal to terraform Death Valley." However, he also felt there may be an obligation to propagate life off Earth as a safety net. So should we terraform now, and do it by planning for the downfall of civilization (in other words, it would be self-perpetuating rather than requiring continuing high-tech support). This is a big issue: "If you really research the space program, you find out what it's really about is plumbing." There have been major terraforming projects even on Earth: Lake Mead, Aswan, Zuider Zee. There have also been *unintentional* terraforming projects: the Sahara and the Amazon rain forest, for example.

[This talk will appear in a slightly different form in *Foundation* in November.]

Debate: There Are Some Things Man Was Not Meant To Know

Monday, 11:30

John Hertz (m), David M. Honigsberg, Michael J. Ward

These debates were new at L.A.con III, and while this one was somewhat interesting, there were still some problems. For one thing, the preliminaries (explaining the background and rules, etc.) took too long-fifteen minutes out of the hour.

Hertz said that this is a game, rather than a formal debate. So they would not be debating precise definitions; in particular, they all agreed that "man" here meant the human race. At the end the audience would vote on whether this is interesting and whether they were persuaded to change their mind, not which side was right.

Hertz (I believe) said that "meant" suggests intention of some kind, though not necessarily how or by whom, or possibly that there are some things so destructive that it would be bad for us to know. It is in that sense paradoxical because it assumes that humans can know what they shouldn't know.

Ward (on the affirmative) said that if there is such a question, then man was not meant to know whether there are things man was not meant to know. But, he said, if humankind learns everything there remains no purpose, so it would be bad to know everything. Also, there are too many things to know, so we can't know everything. (I would respond that there is a difference between there being some specific things man was not meant to know (the subject of the debate), and man not being able to know everything.)

Ward continued, saying that in language, we can know only what we can describe. He said there are three things we cannot know or describe: "whether there is a Creator, what the names of individual particles are, and something I can't tell you."

Honigsberg (on the negative) said that it is true that with knowledge comes responsibility. But we should still know and explore. Not everybody is going to know everything. There are things we don't care to know, but this doesn't mean we are not meant to know them.

(Mark at this point whispered to me that Godel's Proof says there are things we cannot know.)

Honigsberg continued that man is created in the image of God. God is limitless. Therefore man is limitless. Therefore there is nothing man was not meant to know. Ward responded, "We were not meant to know things we would destroy ourselves with," but Honigsberg said, "We have the right to know anything we want to know." (The problem seemed to be that the debaters were not distinguishing between "cannot be known" and "not meant to be known.")

Honigsberg suggested the paradoxical statement, "One of the things we are not meant to know is that there are no limits."

Ward then talked about specific unknowables in terms of the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, again equating that with "not meant to know."

Rick Russell in the audience pointed out, "We know that there are things we do not know and cannot know, so the interest turns on the word "meant." Someone claimed that the government "means" that you not know certain things. But it was noted that clearly some men do know these things, making it useless for the purposes of this debate.

Honigsberg said there was a distinction between the ability to know and the intent to know. His take on Genesis is that the Tree of Knowledge was what gave us the ability to see polarities, black and white, rather than gray-in other words, to *distinguish* between good and evil.

It still seemed that the argument hinged on whether you believe in a Creator. If you don't, then "meant" is somewhat meaningless. Honigsberg claimed that the word "permitted" could be substituted for "meant" giving a very similar question, and if we don't accept a "meaner" then we have resolved the question. Ward however argues the equivalent structure to a "meaner" in a Creator-less universe is Heisenberg, Godel, etc.

By the end of the debate, Ward still equated "impossible to know" with "not meant to know," and claimed that the existence of the question is proof of its truth, whereas Honigsberg said exactly the reverse because they *were* debating it.

There were a lot of digressions throughout the debate, which I did not include here.

The balloting of the twenty-eight audience members had the following results:

Which side made its case best?

- | Affirmative: 10
- | Negative: 0
- | Both equal: 3
- | Abstain: 7

Four people said their minds were changed. When asked, "Do you believe that there are things man was not meant to know?" four said yes and seven said no. Three people felt they didn't get to the question, and one thought both sides were equivalent.

Miscellaneous

The panels were all audiotaped, and on Monday a list of the best-selling tapes was posted. These included "A Look at Past Futures" (Clement, Ellison, Foster, Gerrold, Niven), "Science Fiction of the '50s and '60s" (Ellison, Pohl, Sheckley, Silverberg), "Funny Stories from Science Research and Development" (Busby, Clements, Davidson, Higgins, Tritt), "Science Fiction of the '70s and '80s" (Bryant, Cherryh, Dozois, Ellison, Martin), "The Future of Medicine" (Crownover, Davis,

Ernoehazy, Fiscus, Tritt, Wheeler), "Intermediate Writing" (S. Barnes, Bear, Cherryh, McDevitt, Resnick, Shetterly), a question-and-answer session with Buzz Aldrin, and the debate between Ross Pavlac and J. Michael Straczynski ("Is There a God?"). As someone noted, however, courtesy copies of the tapes were not provided to the panelists, speakers, or debaters. Admittedly, this taping was done as a last-minute addition, and by an outside group, but future conventions should probably negotiate this.

The WSFS Business Meeting ratified the pass-on amendments removing the Hugo Award for Best Original Artwork, adding "related subjects" to the description of what is eligible for the Best Dramatic Presentation, and making various technical changes.

The WSFS Business Meeting passed original amendments allowing the administering committee to veto changes in the NASFiC voting fee, redefining site selection practices, setting the default voting fee as the median of the last three Worldcon Site Selection fees, prohibiting NASFiC from overlapping the Worldcon, expanding the definition of "Non-Fiction Book" Hugo and renaming it "Related Book" Hugo, and various technical changes; if these pass at LoneStarCon 2, they will take effect.

I used to rank all the Worldcons I had been to, but it was getting harder and harder to fit the new ones in, perhaps because the cons of twenty years ago are hard to remember in detail, so instead I will split them into three groups: the good, the average, and the below-average. Within each group they are listed chronologically.

The good: Noreascon I (1971), Midamericon (1976), Noreascon II (1980), L.A.Con II (1984), Noreascon III (1989), MagiCon (1992), and L.A.con III (1996).

The average: Discon II (1974), Seacon (1978), Chicon IV (1982), Confederation (1986), ConFiction (1990), Chicon V (1991), ConFrancisco (1993), and ConAdian (1994).

The below-average: Iguacon (1978), Suncon (1977), Constellation (1983), Conspiracy (1985), Nolacon II (1988), and Intersection (1995).

This con report runs about 22,000 words; last year's was 27,000.

At L.A.con III, I went to fifteen panels, one lecture, one one-man show, one reading, and a movie; at Intersection, I went to thirteen panels, six lectures, and one film; at ConAdian, I went to twenty-two panels, a one-man show, and a film; at ConFrancisco I went to twenty-four panels and two lectures; at MagiCon I went to sixteen panels: at Chicon V I went to twelve panels (I was a real slacker in those days!). The lower number than at the two most recent North American conventions is mostly due to the fewer time slots available for panels, though I may be taking it easier as well.

The 1999 bid was won by Melbourne, Australia (who beat Zagreb by about 10-to-1). The Melbourne convention will be called Aussiecon Three and will be held 2-6 September, 1999. Current rates are US\$35/A\$45 for a supporting membership, US\$140/A\$175 for an attending membership. Guests of Honor are George Turner, Gregory Benford, Bruce Gillespie. Aussiecon Three can be reached at P. O. Box 266, Prospect Heights IL 60070-0266; G.O. Box 1212K, Melbourne, VIC 3001, Australia; or <http://www.maths.uts.edu/staff/eric/ain99>.

Next year in San Antonio!

Film Presentations at L.A.con III
by Mark R. Leeper
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Each year one of the highlights of the World Science Fiction Convention is the collection of film

previews and presentations from the studios showing what their upcoming product will be. The presentations at this year's World Science Fiction Convention in Anaheim were considerably better than it has been in previous years. In recent years the film presentations at Worldcons have become mostly just strings of trailers with little discussion. The presentation at Winnipeg two years ago had, if I remember correctly, only one real talk and that was for the film *Judge Dredd*. That presentation seemed to concentrate on what kind of guns were in the film. The representatives of the film company wanted everybody to know just what sort of firepower they would be seeing in the film. It struck me at the time that the people who were paying these people to come and talk to science fiction fans were the ones who needed to exercise their fire power. The presentations at L.A.con III were somewhat more like they used to be, with more actual filmmakers rather than publicity people coming. Whether this reflects a genuine turnaround in attitudes or if it is merely a consequence of the convention being so near the seat of the film industry is unclear.

The presentations were spread over two days and I could attend only parts. I came in at the tail end of the *Star Wars* presentation but picked up the gist. Apparently Lucasfilm has invested another \$10,000,000 on each of the three *Star Wars* films to renovate and revamp the films. Essentially they are following the experiment Columbia did with *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, creating three "Special Editions" of the now classic science fantasy films in the trilogy. John Williams is writing new music, and several scenes are being enhanced. How does one enhance a scene already shot? The sort of thing that is being done is to add special effects. Mos Eisley spaceport will have new animals and aliens added. Jabba the Hut will appear in the first film. I am not sure where the money is going, and as much as I liked aspects of the trilogy it is hard to be enthusiastic about what is being done. There was a time when there was one version of a film and once you plunked down your admission fee that was the version you saw. There was no special edition of *Gone with the Wind* that could be seen for a separate admission fee. As far as I am concerned I have seen the best version of *Star Wars*. It was called *Star Wars*, not *Star Wars: Chapter 4 A New Hope*. I saw it in 1977. Three times. I might pay to see it again on the wide screen, but I would prefer that what I see is what I saw in 1977, not some specially jazzed-up version.

Men in Black is being made by Columbia Pictures and Steven Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment, for a release of June 6, 1997. The film is based on a comic book by the same name and I was assured by someone behind me in the audience that it was a "fun" comic. The concept seems to be doing for fun a lot of what the upcoming TV series *Dark Skies* will be doing in a more serious and, yes, darker style. The Men in Black are a super-secret team of government agents whose mission is to keep secret the news that we really have been invaded from outer space. In fact, there are many species of aliens in disguise living among us. The film stars Will Smith (no longer as intent on whipping ET's ass), Tommy Lee Jones, and Linda Fiorentino. The incomparable Rick Baker is creating a wide variety of creatures. I hope he has more up his sleeve than we have seen in the presentation. There the aliens were all variations on creepy-crawly earth animals, all crossed with humans. He has things that are like alligator-people, worm-people, and bug-people. The film definitely seems to have a whimsical air, but it certainly looks like it will be a quick throwaway entertainment. It is hard to get too excited right now about the idea that I will have two hours of possible fun next June.

Dinotopia by Jim Gurney, released 1992, was a picture book about a fairy tale land where dinosaurs live together with-and in happy subjugation to-humans. There is not a whole lot of story to the book and what story there is to be filmed with live-action and digitized dinosaurs. Someone in the audience asked how the filmmakers plan to tell much of a story in such a conflict-less land as Dinotopia. Any drama has to bring conflict to utopia. The dinosaurs are to be brought to life by much the same digital techniques as were used in *Jurassic Park*, though we are assured, much more advanced. A tape shown of a head of a dinosaur did seem very flexible but showed much more human emotion than would be realistic. This almost looks like what you would have for a live-action version of *The Land Before Time*. You get to see the emotions of the dinosaurs and to see them ridden by the children, all very cute no doubt. Not all of the special effects were so impressive, however. There was a scene of a city at the top of a waterfall. The waterfall was recognizable by shape as Niagara Falls and the city on the top was very obviously a matte painting. Someone in the audience asked if the human roles had yet

been cast. No. Another asked if there would be pterodactyls. Apparently the production of *Jurassic Park* had problems doing a realistic-looking pterodactyl. The presenter promised a "dynamic pterodactyl." Frankly, I do not know what was so bad about the pterodactyl in the original *King Kong*, currently 63 years old. In so many ways the original *King Kong* proves repeatedly that it deserves its status as a "classic." There was no comment on what was actually the expected release date; the presenter would say only that it would be this century.

Tristar had a presentation for their *Starship Troopers*, to be released July 4, 1997. The presentation started with what was called a "bug test," a short, noisy film that Paul Verhoeven used to sell the concept of the film to Tristar. The scene they shot showed a soldier being pursued by two giant bug-like creatures something like eight or nine feet long. He kills one by emptying a machine gun into it, but the other gets him and stings him to death, then gives a bellow in most un-bug-like fashion. The audience seemed to like it quite a bit, but frankly I just did not think that it looked like the bugs were in the same scene as the human. It is the same problem that early stop-motion animation films had mixing images of humans and the animated creatures. For some reason they just do not look like they are really in the same scene. There was just something about the way it moved that did not look very realistic. Nevertheless we were told that the film would have "the next quantum leap in special effects." (For those who are unfamiliar with the particle physics, a quantum leap is the smallest possible leap, sort of the lowest common denominator of all possible energy leaps. It was an admission of surprising candor on the part of a presenter who would no doubt be surprised that he even made such an admission.)

In any case the presenter claimed that great care was being taken with the effects including having a main spaceship model eighteen feet long. However, to save some money the power-suits of the novel will not be used and there will be no "skinnies" in this version. (I have forgotten what skinnies are, and will probably not be reminded when I see the film.) Nevertheless this is said to be "one of the major science fiction films of 20th century." It will be an epic, with many locations (four or five different planets), lots of special effects, and everything with the possible exception of intelligence. Oh, yes, there was some disappointment that at least the initial release would be in 35mm, not 70mm. Most of the people in the cast will be familiar but from TV rather than other films. Casper Van Dien of series *Freshman Dorm* and *Dangerous Women* is cast as Johnny Rico. Indeed, the only names in the cast I recognized are Michael Ironside (usually a pretty good villain) and Clancy Brown (of *Highlander*, *The Bride*, and *The Shawshank Redemption*).

Of course the fans wanted to know was how close would the film be to the novel by Robert Heinlein. The original story is very much a tract for Heinlein's political point of view. It took four drafts of the script before the filmmakers thought they were ready to shoot. Supposedly Verhoeven has maintained the essence of Heinlein's right-wing political philosophy. Virginia Heinlein is said to "generally like the script." Not surprisingly for a film with a built-in right-wing philosophy, Basil Poledouris is doing the music. I am not sure why, but films scored by Poledouris seem to frequently have themes of nationalism and patriotism. Also the script will call for a lot of fire power. (One day FedEx did not deliver bullets needed for that day's shooting and Verhoeven complained "how can you make a film without bullets?" This is not the kind of question that instills me with a lot of confidence that I really want to see this film.) Computer graphics will be used extensively to show attacks of immense swarms of insect-like aliens. The film will visually open up the society and architecture of the bugs, and there will be many types of bugs.

That was the end of that presentation but in a room of about 1500 people less than 50 got up to leave. There were rumors of better than 1000 people outside wanting to get in for the next presentation, so there must have been a lot of people who were disappointed. It seems the next presentation was for the new darling of the science fiction community, *Babylon 5*. J. Michael Straczynski was going to be present to talk about his series. I had more or less decided myself that the next time that Straczynski showed up to an event I attended I would try to lead a standing ovation for him. I was a little late getting to my feet and had to join a standing ovation already in progress. I have to admit that I myself think that *Babylon 5* is the best piece of science fiction drama that I can remember seeing. It certainly

is difficult for me to think of any filmed story of higher quality. In large part that is because it is one long five-year story that develops in major ways every episode. That makes it certainly the most complex story that I have seen dramatized. It was hard to attend L.A.con III without realizing that *Babylon 5* is popular with the fans in major ways. I never saw even *Star Trek* get such adulation. It may have at some point, but I was not there. I have never seen a World Science Fiction event other than the Masquerade and the Hugo Awards attract so high a proportion of the convention. The rumor is that Straczynski's presentation actually drew more people than the Hugos. More than a quarter of convention showed up and some estimates were closer to half. Straczynski was just beaming. He said "I told them. I said my people would come."

Straczynski's presentation was more entertaining than informative, however. In spite of the popularity of the series with the real fans, Straczynski is still having to bargain with Warner Brothers to get the series renewed a year at a time. He went on to say that in the upcoming episodes we would be going to Centauri Prime a lot, to Narn, and to Earth. One thing he promises by the end of the current season (in hiatus with five more episodes to show) you will know what Shadows want. (If you do not follow the series, just ignore this.) Asked "Will the PsiCorps get involved in war against Shadows?" he said probably not. Straczynski was asked if Talia will be back, and he said no. He wanted to have a screening of the remaining five episodes of the third season at the convention and Warner Brothers was originally amenable. But when they heard that there would be better than 2000 fans to see the episodes they made sounds he thought only a pterodactyl could make and told him no. What he did have for the audience was two extended music and video sequences and two reels of bloopers. One of the reels of bloopers gave some clues as to what plot was coming up. Though it if told more than that we would find out more about the Shadows, I didn't catch it. What he did suggest is that TNT might get some *Babylon 5* movies. They might expand on the Mimbari War or what is happening on other worlds while the main story is unfolding but would not be crucial to the main story-line. A similar approach is taken with the *Babylon 5* comic books. People who watch the weekly program will still get all of the main plot line.

Warner Brothers had a presentation that led off with *Space Jam*, which sounded like it had real possibilities—mostly possibilities for being the most ridiculous idea I can remember for a film. The plot has Bugs Bunny and Michael Jordan playing basketball to save the world from evil cartoon aliens. The film tries to hit more bases than *Naughty Demon Ninja* (no kidding, a real title!). *Space Jam* combines animation and live-action in what appears to be a dumbed-down version of Frederic Brown's "Arena." Many members of the would NBA play themselves (and I still would have no idea who they are). Just why aliens would choose basketball as the test of humans is one of the many unanswered and uninteresting questions about the plot. In any case Warner recognizes the popularity of science fiction, cartoon characters, and basketball and have combined them in mixture that sounds about as potent as crab meat and hot fudge.

Stephen King's *The Shining*, already made as a film by no less a talent than Stanley Kubrick, will be re-made for TV as a six-hour mini-series. At the time Kubrick made his version there was some critical acclaim for the film. My personal survey of viewers of the film said that there was a very high correlation between people who had not read the book and people who liked the film. That works both ways. It means if you have not read the book, it is probably a pretty good film. If you have read the book you will very likely be disappointed in the film. In my view, what went wrong with the Kubrick film was a mistaken strategy. Kubrick said that he wanted to make a really original horror film, so he carefully avoided seeing other horror films to avoid being influenced by them. In most genres, that would work; in horror it was a big mistake. Kubrick decided on what scared him and brought that to the screen. What he never realized is that he had latched onto Standard Archetypal Nightmare #4: the implacable stalker. Yes, that is a big part of the novel in any case, but he toned down the horror ideas and most of what was really creative about the novel. He concentrated on the central nightmare, which unfortunately *The Shining* had in common with the *Friday The 13th* films, the *Halloween* films, and endless slasher-at-the-pajama-party opuses. The film will be shot in the very hotel that inspired the original novel by Stephen King.

The new version is a six-hour mini-series to star Steven Weber and Rebecca De Mornay, with the same director, Mike Garris, and much of the same production as *The Stand*. Weber seems to be best known for the TV show *Wings* though I know him as the title character in *Jeffrey* and Jonathan Harker from *Dracula: Dead And Loving It*. Weber may well be a good choice, but I have some reservations on De Mornay's acting talent.

The presentation had Garris and Weber present talking about the upcoming film. Garris was very respectful of Kubrick but said that he did not like that Kubrick told his own story rather than what was in the King novel. He thinks he can do a better job by sticking much closer to the novel. (Responding to a question he said the film will have the topiary, one of the nicer horror touches from the book, and one that Kubrick dropped.) It was said that ABC, for whom the film is being made, is anxious to get several more King projects, but King is saying that he wants to wait and see how well they do *The Shining*. That means that ABC is pressuring Garris to be accurate to the book and make the kind of film that King would like. It may be just hype, but it makes a nice story and could be an optimistic sign. Asked about his career, Garris said he does not want to be typecast as making King films and little else. A similar question had Weber saying that he was trained as serious actor and would like to go back to Broadway. In the meantime he was looking for different roles from what he has done before, and certainly Jack Torrance from *The Shining* would stretch him in new directions. (He did a good impression of Jack Nicholson as well as one of Sean Connery to the delight of the audience.) Weber did say that the theater does not pay well and he has mouths to feed. Garris says that the six-hour format gives him the opportunity for a slow ramp-up, and he is not looking for tension jumps but for a serious horror film.

The next presentation was for the new *Superman* animated TV series with filmmakers Paul Dini and Alan Burnett. Probably by the time this article is published the show will have already premiered. The series is perhaps trading off of the popularity of the current animated Batman series, but the artwork seemed inferior. Perhaps it is only that the dark images of Batman come across better in the simple art style than do those of Superman. The title hero is drawn very simply with a silly-looking big square jaw. His voice is not what we are used to and it somewhat higher than other actors playing the role. The square jaw seems to call for a deeper voice than we get. After a pilot, the series will play on Saturday mornings at 10AM. Part of the presentation was to show a segment of the pilot episode. I cannot say I was greatly impressed. One thing that bothered me was that here was the famous Superman and thugs were wasting their bullets shooting at him. A great deal of the clip we saw was just this pointless shooting. When I got a chance I asked why they would be so stupid and was told that supposedly the thugs did not know Superman who had been recently revealed to the world. (So whatever happened to the Superboy part of the story? Perhaps that is a parallel universe.) Even so the thugs were very slow to realize that their bullets were not having any effect on the Man of Steel. I asked if as the series progressed at least villains would realize that shooting guns at Superman was pointless and they said that the villains would definitely get smarter as the show progressed. In this reframing the characters are somewhat different than they were in the days I read the comic. Superman is more vulnerable than he has been traditionally, Lex Luthor is a captain of industry, with two-thirds of Metropolis working for him whether they know it or not. The case of voices includes George Dzundza as Perry White and Dana Delaney as Lois Lane. Batman will be included in the stories and will be done with the same voices as in the Batman animated series.

There was just a quick word that there would be a new Superman feature film coming about the death of Superman.

There were more teasers than real information about *Batman and Robin* and *Mars Attacks*. For the Batman film, it will be directed by Joel Schumacher who directed *Batman Forever*. It seems to have a lot spent on the cast. George Clooney will be the third Batman in a series of four films so far. Chris O'Donnell returns as Robin. Arnold Schwarzenegger is Mr. Freeze, Alicia Silverstone is Batgirl, Uma Thurman is Poison Ivy. Excitement unbounded. *Mars Attacks* will do for laughs what *Independence Day* tried to do seriously. It has a bigger cast than *Batman* including Jack Nicholson, Rod Steiger, Joe Don Baker, Annette Bening, Pierce Brosnan, Glenn Close, Danny DeVito, Michael J. Fox, Martin

Short, and Sylvia Sidney. The director is Tim Burton.

There was a presentation on a new projected TV series called *Dark Skies*. There are some TV pilots that are interesting but not very polished. That was certainly true of *Babylon 5*'s pilot. This one was just about the opposite. It has one really interesting idea and the rest is predictable action series. The presenters brought with them what was basically the pilot for the series, but we were warned that it would be heavily revised before airing. The concept is that in 1961 a young man comes to Washington DC to work as a government functionary. Things do not go quite as planned. Against his will he is pulled onto a super-secret government team investigating an alien invasion that has already taken place. The result is a lot like *The Invaders* meets *The X-Files*. What makes *Dark Skies* seem interesting is that is written like a literary "secret history." That is, it is full of historic events that should be in most of the viewers' memories, but the major events of the last four decades of the century all take on new meaning in the light of the knowledge that there are aliens among us. The most interesting aspect is that the series will actually converge on its own present. The final episode will be December 31, 1999 and take place on December 31, 1999. This secret history of the recent past may make the series more of a winner than might otherwise seem.

To what am I looking forward after the film presentations? It is hard to tell but *Starship Troopers* looks like it could be good. On TV *Dark Skies* and *The Shining* look like they deserve a chance. However, *Babylon 5* is certainly the front-runner as most promising, but that is based more on the series' track record. It has gotten better each season and there is no sign of a turnaround. *Space Jam* is at the other end of the spectrum as the least impressive, and I think it would have to win Oscars before I would be interested in seeing it. I do not think there is much chance of that.

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