

Torcon 3
A convention report by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Torcon 3 was held August 28-September 1, 2003, in Toronto, Ontario. It was somewhat beset by problems external to it, which I suppose I should mention: general economic downturn for a couple of years leading up to it, increased security hassles in travel ing, SARS, Mad Cow disease, Artist Guest of Honor falling and breaking his hip less than a month before the convention, biggest-ever black-out less than two weeks before the convention, I think that is at least the high points.

But some problems were of Torcon's own doing. The process of the programming left something to be desired. Several months before the convention, prospective panelists filled in a form that gave, among other things, their available times. At that point, of course, this is pretty much the period of time they will be at the convention (e.g., "arriving noon Friday, leaving noon Monday, nothing after 9PM"). The normal process would then be to set up a tentative program, send it back to the panelists about four weeks before the convention, getting responses, incorporating them, and publishing a program. Torcon 3, however, set up a tentative program, and published it less than two weeks before the convention, without ever sending tentative schedules back to the panelists. Their argument was that they had already asked what times people were available. Apparently the idea that in the intervening months people might have made lunch appointments, discovered the museum they wanted to see was open only on the same days as the convention, decided to arrive later or leave earlier, or realized that they tended to fall asleep at 7PM, did not occur to them. The individual schedules arrived two weeks before the convention--not really enough time, as many people start their trips that early. In addition, panelists want/need time to contact each other and discuss the panel beforehand, and there really was not any time for that, especially since they did not send out any email information for fellow panelists. And with rare exceptions, they never indicated who was the moderator.

(And Mark's origami session never showed up on-line, even though whenever he asked, he was told it was definitely scheduled.)

Also, whatever possessed them to schedule "What Every Pro Should Know About Fandom" opposite "Advice for Aspiring/New Writers", two panels aimed at, if not the same audience, very overlapping audiences?

There was also a panel "If This Goes On: A look at USA 2008" with a description of "Dynastic presidencies; homeland so-called security; suspension of constitutional rights whenever the word 'war' is invoked -- the war on some drugs, the war on terror ... Where is American society headed, and how can it be stopped from getting there? A wholly unbiased discussion." Maybe it's just me, but this seems wildly inappropriate for a science fiction convention held in a country other than the United States.

And I have one more observation, which actually applies to a lot of Worldcons, not just this one. Often there is programming in both a convention center/centre and a hotel. Sometimes it daytime programming in the convention center and evening programming in the hotel. But often there is daytime programming in the hotel as well, and often this is fan programming, filk programming, or costuming programming. If the hotel is right next to the convention centre, this is not bad, but when (as in Toronto or Baltimore) the hotel is three blocks away (or more), then there is a problem. For example, there was a filking item that I had some interest in--but it was in the hotel and there was no way I could get there from the previous panel and back to the next panel. If part of the idea of a Worldcon is to give fans a chance to "try out" other aspects of fandom, then it is a bad idea to isolate some of them in a distant hotel, which basically sends the message, "Unless you are willing to devote a major chunk of your time to this track, we don't want you." I realize that people will say that they cannot fit all the programming in the convention center. Well, maybe that means that there is too much programming. Instead of seventeen simultaneous programming items with two in the hotel, have fifteen, with all of them in the convention center.

[I later heard that a lot of this was at the filkers' request. If they are going to be doing their filking in the evenings in a certain hotel, they would prefer all filking programming to be there so they do not have to carry gear back and forth. I still think that there should be *some* sort of filk programming in the main venue, just to give people a chance to drop in, but I understand the problems.]

And on the positive side, although the Pocket Program was fairly inaccurate (one running gag was that it could be nominated as fiction next year), Program Ops did have an updated grid with titles, rooms, and panelists available every morning by 9AM. There were still some no-shows, but that was mostly on Monday when these things happen anyway.

And the Green Room had a clock!

And finally, there was Progress Report 6. Or rather, there wasn't--at least not until after the convention. Normally, Progress Report 6 is four to eight pages, black-and-white, mailed to arrive before people leave for the convention and containing travel directions and last-minute information. Torcon 3 decided to do a sixty-page book with a full color cover, which ended up mailed to arrive after everyone had left. It was up on the web page, but not everyone has access and even though I tried to print the directions pages, I did not notice that the page for "driving from Buffalo" (which I printed) ended by directing people to the page for "driving from Detroit" (which I did not). Also, I don't think the special parking rate was announced anywhere but on-line, and I do not think the GST refund procedure was explained anywhere but Progress Report 6. At any rate, most people seemed to be unaware of it, and reading about it when they get home will not help them.

Pre-Con Activities

I suppose I should say something about our pre-con activities. We drove up, taking two days from New Jersey to Toronto. Our first day was Sunday, and we drove to Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome for their Sunday World War I air show. We had been to this many years ago, and there were a few changes. Instead of dedicating the show to veterans of the United States military, it is now the military, police, and firefighters. I bet I know when that change was made. The rest was pretty much the same, with silly stuff with Sir Percy Goodfellow, Trudy Truelove, and the Black Baron.

I guess it is ironic that we precede a science fiction convention with something as retro as a World War I air show. Of course, there were many violations of time and space, as planes dropped "bombs" that exploded fifty feet from where they landed, or exploded fifteen seconds after the blast blew the walls down on the building. Must be wormholes and time travel.

After we arrived Tuesday and got settled in, we went out to see what was nearby. What was across the street was the CBC and the CBC Museum, whose museum/exhibit was currently focused on children's programming, though with some other exhibits as well.

Tuesday we TIFFed. What is TIFFing? TIFFing is preparing for the Toronto International Film Festival. Details are available in my TIFF report at <http://leepers.us/evelynleeper.htm/tiff03.htm>, but suffice it to say it took all Tuesday from 9AM to 8PM and another couple of hours Wednesday morning.

After we dropped off our ticket requests we had breakfast at a shop that also had free Internet access, so we checked our mail. Mine was full of Torcon mailing list stuff--I could not figure out how to turn it off before we left. Mark's was not as full and he found out that his parents had a buyer for their house, so we were happy about that.

After breakfast we went to the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO). We were there when it opened at 11AM and stayed until 5PM, with only a short break for a snack.

Here are some random thoughts:

Our docent for the overview tour was Hildi. I mention this because she was very good.

Rodin's "Adam" has a pupik and is not circumcised.

The AGO has a major Henry Moore collection. At one point, some private citizens bought his "Archer" for \$123,000 to put in front of City Hall (because the city would not). When Moore came for the installation, he was so impressed with Toronto that he offered to donate \$2,800,000 worth of his art to them.

There was a "poster" in watercolor advertising "The Far Shore", starring Frank Moore & Celine Lomez, and directed by Joyce Wieland. Is this a real movie?

There was a digital loop by Francis Alys titled "The Last Clown". Does this qualify as the first film of festival? :-)

After this, Mark went to the Marcel Duchamp exhibit. (That is a joke.)

Mark seemed to be overly influenced by some of the art and started making abstract puns.

Why are the only Inuit labels in the Inuit galleries?

When asked about Inuit beliefs, one Inuit summed them up as, "We do not believe; we fear."

There are not many old Inuit carvings relating to their beliefs because it was taboo to carve them. Only because they are now Christian can they carve items relating to traditional Inuit beliefs.

The best know Canadian artists are the Group of Seven: Tom Thomson; Lawrence S. Harris, A. Y. Jackson, F. H. Varley, Arthur Lisssmer, J. E. H. MacDonald, Frank Carmichael, and F. H. Johnston; A. J. Casson, Edwin Holgate, and Lemoine Fitzgerald. Yes, this is a list of eleven people.

In addition to monotheistic and polytheistic, there are religions that claim to be the one true faith (e.g., Christian) and religions that allow persons to hold multiple beliefs (e.g., Buddhism, Shintoism).

I really liked the cartoons and caricatures by Thomas Rowlandson and James Gillray.

Registration

We returned to the hotel about 5PM and went over to the Convention Centre to register. Registration was open, lines were short, but program books, pocket programs, restaurant guides, etc., were not yet available. We got our badges, though, and found the connecting hallway to our hotel. The complimentary Torcon tote bag was nice, large but lightweight.

After dinner, I went over to the Royal York to find a friend's party. The friend was not in, so I went over to Registration to see if I knew any one there. I must have--the line was enormous, and there were only three people behind the tables. So I volunteered and ended up spending almost three hours there. "ID? Okay, here's a bag with what we do have, and here's a ticket good for a program book tomorrow and a souvenir book Sunday, both at Convention Centre registration. Here's your badge. [Pointing to holders] Clip, pin, or lanyard?"

Towards the end there were no bags, just a promise of one tomorrow on showing their badge.

No souvenir books until Sunday?! (Held up in Customs, apparently.) And no program books (pocket programs)? Someone said they were still processing changes, but I do not think that was true, because even before they arrived, everyone was saying that they would be printing a daily schedule and to follow that. (When the program books did arrive Thursday around 10AM, the maps in them were unreadable, and many of the rooms for things like the Green Room were wrong anyway.)

I think the motto of Torcon 3 is "Not yet".

The restaurant guide was okay--a map would have been nice, and walk/transit decisions seemed to be based on the Royal York rather than the Convention Centre, but it did have hours, and what would be open Labour Day. (Very little near our hotel, alas.)

The Internet Lounge was in our hotel. This was convenient.

(When I remembered to count, I have noted the approximate attendance for each panel.)

The Liar's Panel
Thursday, 1300
Deb Geisler, Mike Glycer, John Pomeranz, Howard Waldrop

Description: "Panelists, under the moderation of Guest of Honor Mike Glycer, attempt to come up with the most outrageous prevarications in an ongoing quest to amuse the members and best their fellows."

Well, it wasn't this at all, but basically just a humorous panel. As such, this will be mostly short, disconnected quotes and stories.

Glycer started by saying, "Welcome to the World Science Fiction Society business meeting." This was an actual lie, so I guess the panel at least started out on topic.

Pomeranz claimed Glycer was the moderator (over Glycer's protests) by holding up the program book and saying, "It says it in here so it must be true." It did say that, but the conclusion was unwarranted.

Glycer then tried again; in response to my question of "What do you think of the con so far?" he said, "The is Noreascon 4 gripe session number one."

Pomeranz held up the program book and declared, "It is foolish to have the Liars Panel in light of this."

He also said that they seem to be celebrating a different holiday in Canada, called "Labour" Day.

Either Pomeranz or Glycer quoted Jack Chalker as citing Toronto as "the largest city in the world hat closes at 8PM."

Waldrop said when he arrived at the airport, he was asked at immigration where he was from, and then why he was coming to Canada. He said it was to attend the 61st World Science Fiction Convention, at which the immigration officer reached down and flipped a switch, and a sign above the checkpoint lit up to read "Welcome, Torcon". "You mean this?" he asked.

This led to a variety of stories about taking Hugos through airports. Pomeranz said that Michael Nelson was showing his to someone when he dropped it on the hard floor and it made a long ringing noise, leading people to talk about "Michael Nelson's big long dong." Waldrop (I think) said it should be interesting on Monday this year when people are trying to take two-foot long rockets through security. (Packing and shipping materials are provided, but most people do not want to let go of the thing.) Pomeranz said he could here the questions now: "Are you now or have you ever been a member of WSFS?"

Regarding the airlines' fear that someone might use the rockets to attack Canada, an audience member piped up, "I'm from Quebec and I'm in favor of nuking Quebec." Presumably when he is not in it, of course.

Glycer said when he went through security after Aussiecon 2, his pride in his Hugo was somewhat diminished when the security checker said, "Oh, you've got one of these too." And someone in the audience said that when Dave Langford went through, the guard called out, "Hey, this guy's got two. Speaking of security, Pomeranz described the problems he had taking a quarter-inch Allen wrench onto a plane. "What do you think I could do with this?" "You might try taking the plane apart." "It's an English-unit Allen wrench, and this is a French air bus." That did not convince them.

Waldrop said that the island hopper that British Caledonia flew to the Orkneys had four seats, and sometimes the fourth seat was taken by a man in British tweeds who was grumbling about having to fly to the Orkneys. After a while, the man would get up, declare, "I flew a Spitfire in the war; I can fly this," go into the cockpit and take off. He was in fact the pilot, and British Caledonia eventually asked him to stop doing this.

Pomeranz talked about the little speech given to those who are in exit rows, asking whether they feel they are capable of opening the door, and said his wife was the only person who could truthfully say, "Well, I did it before." When someone asked the circumstances, Pomeranz said that she had seen this thing on the wing....

At about 13:22, Pomeranz announced, "By law in about eight minutes we will begin speaking French. I apologize to those of you who aren't bilingual. I especially apologize to those of you who are."

Someone in the audience said that at some point he needed some unusual conjugations of verbs, and sent five of them to the Academie Francais. The Academie sent back the first four, then there was a noticeable pause even in the letter, after which they said, "We have never seen this verb in this conjugation. We choose this one."

Someone was concerned about the CN Tower toppling, but Pomeranz said not to panic: "When the CN Tower falls they will use it as a bridge across Lake Ontario."

Referring to the disorganization of the program, an audience member plaintively asked, "Wasn't the weather warmer the last time we were at Nolacon?"

Another person, on mentioning that this was her first convention, was told by Pomeranz that there was a long-standing tradition that first-time members have to buy everyone the first round. He talked about his first con, where he got involved with the "B ackrubs for Baltimore" to raise money for a 501(c) convention in Baltimore. A woman came up, stripped off her blouse and waited for her backrub, and Pomeranz remembers thinking, "Is this great tax law or what?"

Waldrop, at one of his early conventions, did a droog outfit for "A Clockwork Orange" as his costume, including a jockstrap stuffed with five pounds of foam rubber. This includes jumping up on a table and doing the whole "Singin' in the Rain" song from that film. In a later panel, he described the expression on people's faces as just like those in the audience after the "Springtime for Hitler" number in "The Producers." It was at that point that his friend told him that "A Clockwork Orange" had not opened in that city yet.

I asked what small lie do you wish were true. (Nothing about world peace or such.) Geisler said, "It's 2005," choosing a date after Noreascon 4. Waldrop added, "And the election's over." Pomeranz just held up the Pocket Program. Glycer scared the panelists with one lie when he said to the panelists, "Did you know that these are hour-and-a-half-long panels?" to which Waldrop immediately responded, "Kill me now."

Waldrop finished the panel with a story about George R. R. Martin. First of all, Martin called him at 7AM from his home in Santa Fe to say he was leaving, then arrived in Austin at 2:35PM. Later, on the way to the banquet, Martin went in to the restroom. When he came out, Waldrop told him he had not zipped up. Martin replied, "I'm Guest of Honor, right? Let them see what they're honoring."

(Yes, Martin was Guest of Honor at Torcon 3, but no, we did not get to see what we were honoring.)

The Myth of Fannish Uniqueness

Thursday, 1700

James Hay, Evelyn Leeper, Nicki Lynch, Andrew Porter, Ben Yalow

Description: "Is fandom truly unique? Why do we distinguish ourselves from non-fans by calling them "mundane"? How do we differ from readers of mysteries, westerns, romance novels? Once,

reading SF/F set you apart. How have changes in the rest of the world collided with our fast-held belief that fans are Slans? In many ways, we've won. Why aren't we happier about it?"

As usual, my attempts to take notes during a panel I am on were not very successful.

There was discussion about the fact that many people seemed to equate "unique" with "better" in this description. But even the uniqueness has gone away, with mystery fans and others having conventions, giving out awards, and in general doing a lot of the same things we do.

One disappointment for many fans from the 1930s was that at the time they felt a socialist revolution was coming (see, for example, the film "Things to Come"), and somehow that never happened, at least not in the United States, although the Roosevelt administration did go somewhat in that direction as a response to the Depression.

One difference in science fiction seems to be the lack of a barrier between fans and writers, where fans become writers and writers are fans. Someone said that media professionals like actors do not understand the dynamic and expect a lot of adulation "because they read a few lines someone else wrote," so I found myself defending acting as a craft worthy of respect. However, actors who are serious about their craft expect to be respected for their skill in a wide range of roles, not because they were in a science fiction film (or a mystery film, or whatever). (Though there is something to be said for doing a good job in portraying a character such as Frodo or Professor Challenger, about whom everyone has an opinion already.)

There is also something in the notion of being "slans"--both superior and persecuted--that appeals to people.

Yalow concluded by saying that what really made science fiction fandom unique was that it was engaged in a continuing meta-conversation that has lasted over eighty years already. (At Readercon, however, Allen Steele suggested that the last twenty or thirty years have seen science fiction in a greenhouse environment, with authors talking to each other rather than to anything outside the field. To the extent that this is impacting the writing and making it more insular, this is a bad thing, even if the general notion is good.)

Conversation with George and Howard
Thursday, 2200
George R. R. Martin, Howard Waldrop

Description: "Two old friends get together to have a chat."

Before the chat started, Waldrop had to go get an extra microphone. While he was doing this, Martin said, "The weird thing is that I'm the 'Analog' writer."

Martin started the actual chat by saying that he had known Waldrop since 1963, even though he did not meet him until 1972. In high school, he was a comics fan, and saw Waldrop selling "Brave & Bold" number 28 for a quarter. "He had bought it for a dime and he figured the value had peaked." In fact, Waldrop was normally such a collector that Martin recently asked him to look up forty-two-year-old fanzines that had his first three stories.

Waldrop said that when they were writing for comics fanzines, "We thought fanzines needed text [stories], but it [the stories] was really to get third class mailing rates." Many of the stories are now lost; as Waldrop explained, "We had not yet mastered the art of carbon paper."

Martin said his early work included the "first heroic brain in a fishbowl"--"Gary Zander, Man of Action" (I think). Waldrop said that these stories had "no dialogue to get in the way of the action--much like the fantasy series he's doing now." To which Martin shot back, "Race you to the Hugo! I won!" Waldrop responded, "Race you to the World Fantasy Award!" to which Martin acknowledged, "You won."

Martin said, "I wrote about costumed super-heroes; Howard wrote about sword and sorcery, Roman gladiators, the Three Musketeers. . . . Readers have never been able to figure out what Howard's up to--"The story about the Three Musketeers was interesting, but what special powers does Cardinal Richelieu have?"

Martin said that he had Waldrop used to write each other, "letters so long we needed four cents to mail them."

The two finally met at the 1972 MidAmerican Con (not to be confused with MidAmeriCon, the 1976 Worldcon). Waldrop had told Martin, "You can stay in Buddy's room." When he got there, Martin asked the person who answered the door, "Are you Howard?" "No." Are you Buddy?" "No." "Who are you?" "I'm George." There were about ten people in the room, all Texans with tans, and the next morning someone said, "Everything was okay except I stepped on some pasty-faced bastard in the hall." That was Martin. Martin described the situation as "Howard was promiscuously collaborating with all these other Texans."

Waldrop revealed that Martin, as one of his many early jobs, ran Tubs of Fun at Uncle Milties Amusement Park. When Martin was moving to Washington, DC, Waldrop told him that in DC there were eight women for every man. Two weeks went by, then Waldrop got a postcard from Martin, which said in very small, sad printing, "Somebody has sixteen."

Martin said of Waldrop's early career, "J. W. Campbell purchased Howard's [first] story and then died of shock." Waldrop never had good luck. At one point according to Martin, Terry Carr and Robert Silverberg both wanted "Custer's Last Jump", so Waldrop got them to bid and managed to sell it to the *lowest* bidder. Waldrop called that a "scurrilous lie." He said what really happened was that Carr bought it for "Universe" and then the publisher dropped the series. So Silverberg bought it for his series, which the publisher then dropped, and so on, for four years, with the price dropping each time.

Waldrop said his first story, "Lunchbox", was just reprinted for the first time in Steven H Silver's "Wondrous Beginnings". The only reason he was willing to allow this, he said, was "we got to write an essay about what dorks we were when we wrote our first story." (Also, at Readercon he said that Silver pointed out that the stories were *all* the author's first stories, so a lot would be less than perfect.) Martin said that his first story is also in "Wondrous Beginnings". There are two other volumes, "Magical Beginnings" and "Horrible Beginnings".

Someone asked about their early stories in fanzines, and whether they were still around. Martin said that one of his was "Only Kids Are Afraid of the Dark" and another was "Strange Saga of the White Raider" about a superhero who fought on skis with a flame-thrower and a submachine gun in the poles. (This was after the first James Bond films, but I do not think Q ever came up with these.) There was also "Manta Ray".

Martin said, "Howard is the stubbornest man in the world. I've never been able to convince him of jack shit." For example, Waldrop wanted to do his story "Jetboy", while Martin wanted to do "Wild Cards". So Waldrop refused to make changes to his story to make it fit into the "Wild Cards", and eventually Martin gave in--and then admitted that "Jetboy" was better because of it.

Interestingly, Waldrop said he would not make the changes, because his story had to begin on

September 15, 1946, which was Tuesday. However, it was actually a Sunday.

Somehow they got to talking about Roger Zelazny, who was very restrained, though according to one of them, Zelazny once got so angry he said "darn". Talking about how Zelazny stayed inside all the time, Waldrop said, "He lived in a basement apartment, ri ght?" "Third floor," responded Martin. "He worked in a basement office?" "19th floor." But in any case, he stayed indoors all the time, and Martin claimed, "The entire thrust of human civilization has been to try to get us out of the outdoors."

Waldrop tended to live a less urban life--and certainly a more impoverished one. Martin said, "I've never visited Howard when he had all his utilities working at once." Pizza Inn charged \$1.49 for all the pizza you could eat, and Waldrop would do this e very two days to survive.

This carried through to his convention activities. He arranged for Martin to be a "Special Guest" at Dallascon 73. At the station, Martin was met by a pick-up truck full of people, mattresses, and old truck parts. The cab was full, but they just holler ed, "Climb on board, Special Guest!" Waldrop described him as wearing a "sartorial splendor suit which made you think a comet was coming toward you."

Waldrop again told the "Clockwork Orange" masquerade story, already recounted in the "Liars Panel" write-up above.

At Constellation, Waldrop and Gardner Dozois had a similar program item, the "Howard & Gardner Show". Partway through, someone burst in and yelled, "You're making too much noise. Stop laughing." Denvention had an item, "The History of SF Film", enacted entirely by Waldrop. For the part about 3-D movies, he handed out 3-D glasses, then threw paper wads at the audience. He promised he would reprise this at the Worldcon after he wins a Hugo.

There once was a Dallas bid for the 1973 Worldcon (opposite the Torcon II bid) that withdrew, and Waldrop convinced Martin to go to Noreascon I to help revive it. Then Martin did not show up.

Martin said when he was young, he lived in the projects and had turtles and parakeets. The turtles lived in toy castle. Now, many years later, he has based his hexology on them. He said they tended to die "under the refrigerator--sort of the turtle equ ivalent of Mordor"

Martin summed up Waldrop as, "He's as good a writer as the field has and as good a friend as a guy could want."

Waldrop said of Martin, "He rooked me out of a \$12,000 comic book ['Brave and Bold']. I still love him." Martin said that before he left for Torcon 3, his wife told him to give back the comic. Martin reached into his bag--and then said, "What do you th ink, I'm crazy?!" And he pulled his hand back out, empty. Waldrop laughed the loudest of all.

Remembering Isaac Asimov Friday, 1000

Hal Clement, Dr. Elizabeth Anne Hull, Fred Pohl, Sheila Williams

Description: "A retrospective of Isaac Asimov's, the man as well as his works. How he changed science-fiction and his indelible mark on the genre."

Pohl described himself as not only the senior member on the panel, but as the person who knew Asimov longer than anyone else alive. In the 1930s, he met Asimov in the Futurians, a group of fans

who wanted to be professionals. At the time he and Asimov lived at opposite ends of Prospect Park in Brooklyn, and he would often walk over to the Asimov family candy store, especially since every time he did he would get a malted milk ball from Asimov's mother. However, Pohl said, "I don't know what to tell you about him that he hasn't told the world about himself."

Someone said that Asimov had written 460 books, to which Pohl replied, "460--that is . . . revolting."

Clement said he could still remember the dinner he had with Asimov, Dr. Boyd (a biologist), and Fred Whipple (an astrophysicist) during which they designed Mesklin. However, he said that was the only lengthy science fiction discussion he ever had with Asimov.

Clement said that he shared a room with Asimov at the New York Worldcon (1956, I assume--1939 seems too early, and Asimov probably would have commuted). Neither of them drank, so L. Sprague de Camp decided their room would be the safest place to store all the liquor.

He had two "recognition" stories about Asimov. In one, Asimov was being eyed by a couple of people who eventually worked up the nerve to come over and ask, "Aren't you Al Capp?"

The other took place in a theater restaurant. Asimov was there with his first wife, Gertrude (Gittel in Yiddish), and there was a table nearby of famous directors and writers. Gertrude asked him to go over and introduce himself so she could meet them. He did not want to, but she was insistent, so they walked over, but just as Asimov was about to speak, one of the people at the table jumped up and cried, "Gittel, is that you?"

Hull said that people did not realize "what a true gentleman he was." For example, he always answered letters the same day he received them.

He wrote prodigiously, though at one point during his final illness he told Hull he was not writing, which she said really meant he was only producing half or a third of his previous output.

Hull admired his integrity. In the "Lucky Starr" books, the smokers invariably turned out to be the villains. And though Lucky Starr would accept a drink so as not to offend his hosts, he would always find some way not to drink them.

Williams said that when Asimov was ill and finally said in January 1992 that he could not continue his monthly column in Asimov's which had been running since 1977, Williams told him that he was entitled to take a break from writing, and she realized at that point that indeed Asimov had *never* taken a break from writing. Pohl said that when he, Asimov, and a lot of other notables went on a cruise to see the Apollo 16 lift-off. Asimov showed up for meals (and the launch), but spent the rest of the time in his room, from which could be heard the constant sound of typing. (Pohl described the cruise by saying, "Everybody else who really mattered except Harry" was on it as guests of the cruise line, but apparently the line had not thought to try to sell tickets until only a few weeks before the cruise, and lost a bundle.) As Pohl put it, "Isaac never saw a piece of paper he didn't want to write on."

Williams first met Asimov at a Star Trek convention when she was a teenager. Her father had written Asimov that his daughter would love to meet him and could they have dinner together. Asimov wrote back, declining, but when Williams's father saw Asimov at a table at the banquet, he dragged Sheila over and said to Asimov, "Hello, I'm Mr. Williams." To which Asimov immediately said, "And this must be your lovely daughter Sheila." Sheila had very chipped nail polish, so when Asimov asked, "Can I hold your hand?" she replied, "No!" "Can I kiss you?" "Yes!"

Hull said, "Isaac always tried to tell the truth as he saw it," but she found it unbelievable that he would not have heard of transactional analysis in the 1950s in New York as he claimed. It is

possible, but Hull noted that "fiction writers are professional liars."

Williams said she liked it when Asimov's wife could convince him to go away for a long weekend, because he always wrote a story under these conditions. Mark Kelly went through the old issues of "Asimov's" and discovered that even a decade after his death, Asimov still holds the record for most stories in "Asimov's", though Robert Reed is closing fast. One time he sold the magazine a story and they had commissioned a cover for it when he discovered that he had made a mistake about the rights and could not sell it to them. So overnight he wrote a new story to match the cover.

Clement said that Asimov said of the launch, "It was nice to know I had actually seen a semi-astronomical event." Asimov learned from reading, not from observation. When Clement discovered that Asimov had never seen Saturn through a telescope, he arranged for time on a telescope nearby, trained it on Saturn, and handed it over to Asimov. Asimov looked in, and exclaimed, "My God, it really does have rings."

Speaking of Asimov's fiction, Pohl said that Newt Gingrich had said that Asimov's psychohistory novels (the "Foundation" series et al) were (among) the most influential books he had ever read. Pohl added that he used to be upset that Presidents always read mysteries instead of science fiction, then along came Gingrich to make him think that maybe mysteries were better.

Pohl also said that he co-authored a story with Asimov which was reprinted in "The Early Asimov", entitling him to 3% of the royalties on that book. This amount has exceeded the 100% of royalties he receives for "The Early Pohl".

Asimov also worked on a lot of anthologies, and talked to Martin H. Greenberg every day. (Hull referred to Greenberg as "The Mad Anthologizer.")

Towards the end Pohl collaborated with Asimov on "Our Angry Earth". Pohl had figured that Asimov would do a majority of the writing, but because of his illness, he did only about 10%, leaving Pohl with more work than he had expected.

Hull said that of his biographies, the one-volume "I. Asimov" was more revealing than the two-volume "In Memory Yet Green"/"In Joy Yet Felt".

Pohl and Clement also said that, unlike a lot of authors, Asimov was very ready to admit mistakes. Williams said that he actually liked getting an occasional rejection, because they would make him feel more confident that the stories that were accepted were good, and not just accepted because he wrote them. I said that Mark had noted that Asimov put his disclaimers about mistakes at the front of the re-issues rather than at the back, giving as an example "Lucky Starr and the Seas of Venus", and Hull said that he was careful not only about the science but also about the grammar in those books, making the dialogue sound natural but never violating the rules of grammar.

Someone in the audience asked, "Where the hell did he get those bolo ties?!" and Pohl responded, "From Lester del Rey."

Someone asked about Asimov's fear of flying. Pohl said that his only flight was for the Army to the Pacific for an atomic bomb test, and he thought that might have something to do with it, but Williams said that it was not just a fear of flying, but a fear of heights. Though he had a penthouse apartment overlooking Central Park, he would never go out on the balcony, or even too near the window.

The panel closed with an audience member suggesting that all the USians write the Postal Service proposing a commemorative stamp for Asimov.

Books vs Movies: Should They Be Compared?

Friday, 1100

Janice Eisen, Paul Levinson, Elizabeth Miller, Patrick Nielsen-Hayden, Melinda Snodgrass

Description: "Are the two types of media even comparable? Given the advances in media, can CD-based literary efforts really be compared to more traditional literature?"

[I am writing this at an outdoor cafe at the Toronto International Film Festival while I am between films, which is I suppose appropriate.]

Nielsen Hayden started out by observing that while they are both narrative (generally--I have seen some films that are not), they are different kinds of engines and produce different effects. A book produces a sort of contemplative reverie, while a movie generally concentrates on presenting some sort of spectacle. (I should specify that the discussion focused on fiction.) This spectacle need not be spectacular, but is something of a visual nature--for example, you need to see some sort of visual instantiation of a character's emotional state rather than reading about it.

Miller, whose area of expertise was Dracula, said Dracula, at least, had been "movied to death." She said she had no objections to adaptations, even somewhat inaccurate ones, unless the director proclaims it the most accurate ever and even worse "has the audacity to name it after the author." I wonder what she was talking about. :-)

Snodgrass said it is also possible to err in the opposite direction, and gave as an example "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone", which she described as "so reverent it was fossilized." One problem is that screenplays run about 10,000 words, or a hundred pages, while novels are much longer.

Levinson said that he had been involved in producing "The Chronology Protection Case", which was done as high-budget radio, but would be low-budget film. He said it was fair to compare them, but in many ways the medium is in fact the message. Nielsen Hayden responded, "It is also fair to compare epic poetry and silent comedies. So?"

Returning to Dracula, Miller said, "One would expect to see something of the spirit of the novel. There was that in F. W. Murnau's "Nosferatu" but not in Coppola's "Bram Stoker's Dracula" (which added an entire death and reincarnation theme taken more from the old "Mummy" films than from Bram Stoker). Levinson distinguished between literal and thematic faithfulness, leading Nielsen Hayden to suggest this was the question of whether "West Side Story" was faithful to "Romeo and Juliet". Perhaps, but he observed "'Romeo and Juliet' has less dancing." (True, but there is a dance in "Romeo and Juliet".) Speaking of dancing, Miller said that Guy Madden's "Dracula--Pages from a Virgin's Diary" done with the Royal Ballet of Canada, was also true to the spirit of Stoker's novel.

Snodgrass said that one should not expect movies to be faithful because "Hollywood is a money engine." (This seems to ignore completely independent film makers, or film makers in other countries.) Hollywood believes that in order to be financially successful, she said, a movie must have a strong background, good characters, and strong dialogue. (And as I see it, the truth of the matter is that most science fiction novels do not have strong dialogue--but then I would think a good screenwriter could do something along these lines.)

Someone in the audience pointed out that in reading a novel the reader controls the pace, but in viewing a movie (in a theater) the pace is controlled by the creators of the film. While it is true that one can pause a DVD, or rewind, it is not a medium as amenable to that as a book.

Levinson said that just as we draw distinctions between the lyricist and the composer, we have a

similar distinction between the writer and the director of a film. Apropos of something, he quoted George Harrison as having said, "We were the only people who went through the 1960s without the Beatles."

When some told Roger Zelazny how sorry they were for what Hollywood had done to his book "Damnation Alley", Zelazny reached up to his shelf, took down the book, and said, "My book's right here." (It is worth noting that while in film, new writers can be brought in, actors can suggest changes, etc., in theater the director and cast are not allowed to change any lines at all without the playwright's permission.)

Snodgrass said that there are things that simply do not translate well from the book to the screen, and that much as she like Tom Bombadil as a character in the book "Lord of the Rings", she really did not want to see him on the screen.

Television was mentioned, but Snodgrass said that "Television is about comfort" (meaning television series). (I wonder if a panel could be done on the different requirements and expectations for a theatrical movie versus a television movie.)

Levinson said that the real problem with inaccurate adaptations is they deceive the prospective viewer about what they are going to see, much as a restaurant that advertised itself as a Japanese restaurant but served only pasta and veal parmesan would be deceptive.

Someone said that more than just the script can work against the faithfulness of a movie to a book--sometimes the actors chosen are not appropriate to the role. Someone in the audience said that they knew a lot of people who would not read the book if they had seen the movie first. This seemed to be because they would not enjoy the book as much after the movie, or would not think it as good, though I wonder if the fact that they would probably be seeing the specific actors in the roles and the specific images might not force the book into paths the author did not intend. Levinson thought it was "first love" syndrome, in that if people read the book first, they prefer that, and if they see the movie first, they prefer that. Miller said that sometimes when people see a movie they do not like, they blame the author or the book, even the screenwriter made massive changes.

An audience member thought "a really really good book can't be translated as well as a lesser book."

I asked whether it made more sense to talk about what could be done in a film than could not be done in a book, and to make films that used those aspects instead of just adapting a book. Snodgrass said that "Moulin Rouge", for example, had to be a film-- there is no way to have it as a book. Eisen later said that "Memento" was another film that would not work in another medium. Snodgrass also thought that "The Silence of the Lambs" was a great adaptation. I observed that the classic example of "the film better than the book" is "Jaws". (There is a whole list of them in the FAQ at <http://leepers.us/evelynleeper.htm/movies.htm>.)

Regarding the oft-spoken claim that the book is becoming passe, Nielsen Hayden proclaimed, "I have faith in books and their on-going existence."

Regarding the idea that reading more actively involves the reader than watching movies does the viewer, Levinson said this was true for some films, but that directors such as Sergei Eisenstein wanted non-passive viewers for their films. And Snodgrass decried the tendency of Hollywood to "spoon-feed what you should feel emotionally." (I suspect that documentaries involve more active participation by the viewer in terms of evaluating information and reliability, which may be why they are less popular. I know that at the Toronto International Film Festival, I take more notes at the documentaries and they generate more discussion than the fiction films.)

Nielsen Hayden named John Sayles as one of the best Hollywood directors--who also just happens to

be a "script doctor" as well. (Coincidentally, I am writing this up while waiting to see Sayles's new film, "Casa de los Babys".)

Regarding the question of computer games and such in comparison to (and sometimes connection with) novels, Nielsen Hayden lamented, "I'm looking forward to my adventure game of 'Mill on the Floss'". An audience member thought games would increase in popularity because "you're making your own movie," to which Nielsen Hayden responded, "I want someone else to make my movie." (Actually, if making your own movie were better than having someone else do it, wouldn't writing your own book be better than having someone else do it as well?)

Someone mentioned the possibility of non-linear works using hyperlinks, but Geoff Ryman already did something like that with "253", and "Choose-Your-Own-Adventure" books have been around for decades. ("You are in front of a castle. If you choose to go in, turn to page 47. If you choose to search outside for treasure, go to page 79.")

(I noticed in all this discussion people were talking only about how faithful or unfaithful the movie is to the source book, and no one was talking about whether novelizations are faithful to the movies they are based on.

1953: The Year of the First Hugo
Friday, 1300
David Kyle, Fred Lerner (m), Robert Silverberg

Description: "1953 yielded a bumper crop of science fiction, including Asimov's Second Foundation, Clarke's Childhood's End, Bester's The Demolished Man, Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451, Pohl and Kornbluth's The Space Merchants and Sturgeon's More than Human. This is also the year in which Marion Zimmer Bradley and Anne McCaffrey both started publishing. A look at a year that produced many of today's classics."

[175 people]

Lerner introduced himself by saying in 1953 he was a juvenile reading "Mrs. Pickerell Goes to Mars". David Kyle said, "I'm the man in the red jacket."

Kyle began by summing up 1953. By then, the Worldcon had already been pretty well established--the 1953 Worldcon was the eleventh Worldcon, officially called "The 11th Worldcon", though popularly known as Philcon II. The first Hugos were awarded, though they were not called "Hugos" yet, but "Achievement Awards." They were thought to be a one-shot, and not awarded in 1954, but re-instated in 1955 and awarded every year since then. "I was no longer a juvenile in 1953; I was a mature young man," Kyle concluded.

"And you still are," Silverberg added. Silverberg said he remembers the 1953 Worldcon because his first professional payment for a story was *at* the Worldcon. Since then, he said, "I've now attended fifty of them, which is a lot of lost sleep." (I wonder which one he missed, or if he is just rounding.) He described his joy and awe at seeing the great authors of the time walking by back then, and when he now hears fans whispering "That's Silverberg," he remembers thinking, "That's Sturgeon, and that's Sheckley, and"

There were thirty-nine magazine in 1953. The major ones were "Astounding" (later "Analog"), "Fantasy and Science Fiction", and "Galaxy". Of the others, some were very minor indeed--"Vortex is not widely respected even by its reader." (The singular is Silverberg's.) Now the science fiction section in a bookstore "stretches for nine miles with foil on the covers," but then there were basically

three publishers of science fiction: Doubleday, Ballantine, and Ace. Doubleday was doing one a month. Ballantine, which started in 1952, paid a living wage of US\$5000 a book (equivalent to US\$50,000 to US\$75,000 in 2003). Ace Books published doubles at first, and tended less to the literary and more to the adventurous. Silverberg talked about the quality of some of the classic books being published and said, "I couldn't hope to match it, but I did manage to sell a few things, and I got better." There were also smaller publishers such as Gnome Press.

Describing the physical Hugos of that year, he said, "I've seen the 1953 Hugos and pathetic little scrunchy things they were, homemade rockets, but what a year it was."

Kyle said that Silverberg improved very quickly, and in 1956 won the Hugo for Most Promising Writer, beating out such contenders as Harlan Ellison and Frank Herbert. The Hugos awarded in 1953 included awards for novel, magazine, and science writing. "No one foresaw," Kyle said, "that the Hugos would become the focal point of the convention."

Gnome Press, Kyle said, was inspired by the earlier Fantasy Press. Their first publication was "The Carnelian Cube" by Fletcher Pratt and L. Sprague de Camp. The editor was Martin Greenberg. Kyle also emphasizes this was not the current anthologist, saying, "Martin Greenberg is not related to Martin Greenberg, but that's another story . . . and what a story it is, too." (Sounds like a panel item here.) Gnome also published Isaac Asimov's "I, Robot" and Arthur C. Clarke's "Sands of Mars". Everything for it was coming from the pulps, where the great training ground of short stories flourished. And the fans would discuss the magazines, at least the three major ones, every month, because they were where the best work was being done. He lamented the decline of the short story in later times.

Kyle said that around that time was formed Amalgamated Fantasy Publications, a group of publishers (small press, I assume) who all shared one salesman in an attempt to try to get better distribution than they would have individually. But Walter Bradbury created the Science Fiction Book Club, and the combination of this with Doubleday drove out the small publishers like Gnome Press, though often by buying them out rather than wiping them out. In fact, Silverberg noted that had the old Greenberg been more honest about paying royalties, he might still be collecting something on them rather than having had them taken away by lawyers.

Lerner pointed out that there were other publishers. Scribner's was doing the Heinlein juveniles, and Winston was also publishing juvenile science fiction. Kyle added Arkham House to the list.

The mention of juveniles reminded Silverberg that he noticed that when he wrote a story, he was paid once and that was it, but when Heinlein wrote a juvenile, he kept getting royalties. So Silverberg's first novel was also a juvenile, and he was paid royalties for thirty-five years on it.

I asked which were the best of the "minor" magazines of the time. Silverberg said Robert Lowndes did very well "making bricks without straw" in "Future", "Science Fiction", and "Science Fiction Quarterly". Other good ones were "Startling Stories" and "Thrilling Wonder Stories", which published Philip Jose Farmer's "The Lovers" as well as lots of Jack Vance and Poul Anderson. Speaking of Farmer reminded Silverberg that when he won the "Most Promising Author" award in 1956, Farmer's wife said to him, "Phil won this in 1953 and hasn't sold anything since."

Talking again about the conventions, Silverberg said at the time, publishers donated manuscripts to help finance the conventions (even though, as he pointed out, the manuscripts really belonged to the authors rather than the publishers). And to show what sort of budgets people had, Silverberg said that at one convention he speculated by renting a suite for \$12 and renting out floor space. Apparently, there was a major furor when Kyle, as chair, raised the membership rate for Worldcon from \$1 to \$2 for the 1956 Worldcon.

Kyle mentioned that the Fantasy Writers Guild was formed about that time, and Alfred Bester would not join because he wanted it to be a union, and it was not. Silverberg and Lerner thought this ironic, since these days, some writers will not join because they think it is too much a union.

But for the Dinosaur Killer
Friday, 1100
Michael Brett-Surman, Harry Harrison, Robert J. Sawyer

Description: "How close were dinosaurs to intelligence? Should we expect to see the saurian form elsewhere? Is there a typical treatment of saurian intelligence and is it justified?"

[120 people]

I caught only the end of this looking for Mark. Sawyer was calling on someone, saying, "In the red shirt in the back? You realize you'd be the first to go on 'Star Trek'". And later, he announced, "We got the five-minute warning--which is more than the dinosaurs got."

Someone in the audience asked, "Would we recognize a dinosaur urinal if we found it?" (Later in the convention, a speaker pointed out that reptiles do not urinate, so scenes on the various Discovery Channel's "Walking with Big Scary Things" series that show dinosaurs marking their territory by urinating are completely wrong.)

A panel member noted that we have records only for lowland fossils where they were preserved in sediment.

Fannish Ghetto
Friday, 1200
Janice Gelb (m), Peter Knapp, Lloyd Penney, Alex von Thorn

Description: "Fandom comprises dozens of subgroups. While wandering the halls or even perusing this guide, you may note references to "gay fen," "Furry fans," "gamers," "filkers," "costumers," "fanzine fans," or "SMOFs." Are these identifications sometimes made in a manner that can be construed as discriminatory? Are we becoming so balkanized that it's impossible to keep a foot in multiple fandoms? Do some groups of fans look down on other groups of fans? Why would we accept this when so many of us oppose discrimination in our mundane lives?"

[50 people]

Gelb was wearing a T-shirt that said in several languages, "Do not blame me that my president is an idiot. I did not vote for him." Well, that is my translation, since there was no English. The Spanish on which I based this read, "Pido disculpa que mi presidente es un idiota. No vote por el.")

Penney began by saying it is difficult to find out in general why we must cubbyhole people.

Gelb said there are specialty conventions, so the fans one finds at Worldcons are usually willing to sample a wider range of interests. Knapp said that he liked Gaylaxicon for its safe environment, but he also likes the variety of a general Worldcon.

(At this point, I realized that the "specialty fandoms" listed were really orthogonal, in that gay fandom is a different sort of specialty fandom than fanzine fandom. One is a fandom based on the

inherent nature of the fans, while the other is a fandom based on common interests. While gay fans might like a safe environment, it is not clear that a gay media fan and a gay fanzine fan will find a lot more in common with each other than with a straight media fan and a straight fanzine fan.)

Penney said he sees fandom as a smorgasbord, where one is encouraged to sample. This is when I asked about the fact that the filk and costuming programming seemed to be isolated away from the rest of the program and found out this was to a great extent by their own request for logistical reasons. (See general comments at the beginning of this report.)

Knapp said that he felt there really were not as many "curmudgeons" who sneered at other types of fans as there are made out to be, and certainly he is seeing fewer who have problems with gay fans. Gelb thought the major conflict was between "literary" and "media" fans. (I have a foot in both camps, though I am a peculiar sort of media fan, I suspect.)

Someone in the audience said that a lot of the "fringe fandoms" take the attitude of "just give us a room and we'll plan the rest out." But as I explained, this is part of what caused the problem in the first place. Way back when, Worldcon used to have a "Burroughs Dum-Dum"--a meeting especially for fans of Edgar Rice Burroughs. (It was named after what Burroughs called the councils of the apes.) Sometime in the early 1970s, "Star Trek" fans decided they wanted a special program item, and "Planet of the Apes" fans wanted one, and so on. But at the time there were not then seventeen simultaneous items, and giving slots to "special-interest" groups was eating into the "general" programming. So conventions "pushed back" and special interest groups felt they were being discriminated against.

From the audience, Kent Bloom said that these days there are many fans with whom he has no overlap.

The audience and panel did seem to agree that literary fans feel marginalized and pushed to the side these days, so there is some jealousy and nostalgia and resentment. Gelb said this is due in part to the widespread advertising of commercial media conventions, and said that we needed to make clear the difference between fannish conventions and gate shows. (One of the main philosophical distinctions we make is between tickets and memberships.)

An audience member said that one problem seen in media fans is the "abandonment of critical discrimination or judgement," to which my response is, "Like we don't see that in readers?"

Knapp closed with a comment in favor of the general convention, saying "I like being part of the world as a whole."

**What if: Canada had a Different Neighbour than the USA?
Friday, 1700
John Dupuis, Nalo Hopkinson, Ben Jeapes, Connie Willis**

Description: "If Canada had a neighbour that was NOT the United States, would Canada be any different? Richer, more powerful, more listened to? Is our proximity to the United States a blessing in disguise? Or would Canada's socialist economy work better without the constant brain drain going south? What if Canada had attained nationhood BEFORE the USA? And where would the USA be without us?"

[250 people]

(Hopkinson pronounces her first name "nah-low", in case you were wondering.)

Lots of stereotypes--United States, Canadian, and other--were thrown around at this panel.

Dupuis said that he was Canadian, but "twice I came close to not being Canadian--I was living in Montreal." (This resonated with a line from "Mambo Italiano", a film about an Italian family living in Montreal. The son asks his father why he came to Canada instead of the United States, and his father says, "No one told us there were two Americas: the real America--the United States--and the fake America--Canada. And no one told us there were two Canadas: the real Canada--Ontario--and the fake Canada--Quebec.")

Jeapes, a Briton, said, "I'm not a Canadian, but we do have the same Queen." Willis said she was not from Canada either, but said that she often felt like Canada was not really a different country. The audience seemed a bit taken aback by this apparent cultural imperialism, but Willis explained that what she meant was, "I don't have the constant stress and strain of how to find the bathroom--or how it works." But she also said, "The land does shape us quite a bit," and that as a Coloradan she had a lot of the same concerns as people in the plains provinces (Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan)--lack of water, farming issues, etc.

Hopkinson said that one problem seemed to be that "stating a Canadian identity is shaped by what you're not" (e.g., not American). One annoyance, she said, is "I'm often introduced as 'African-American.' . . . 'African-American' is a lovely word, but it's not another way to say 'black.'" In France, she said, she is referred to as "English" for some reason. Stories of such notables as Nelson Mandela being introduced as "African-American" were then bandied about.

Returning to the topic, Dupuis said, "We're very conscious of how we're seen by the rest of the world. And we're *not* seen by the rest of the world." Who *would* Canada want as a neighbor, he asked.

Jeapes suggested Denmark, though someone noted that it would have to be stretched out considerably. Another person said that unless the United States were replaced by an equally large country, you would have to have about sixty countries to cover the border.

Jeapes said that the English attitude toward Canada seemed to be, "We lost one [the United States] and the other was what was left over," and that Canada was "useful for when we have a European war and want to throw men at the enemy." (This attitude seemed to extend to Australia and New Zealand as well.) He said the United States seemed to expand by the Monroe Doctrine. Someone pointed out that he meant "manifest destiny", to which he responded "pretty close."

He also noted that First Nations people (the Canadian term for American Indians or Native Americans) do not necessarily recognize borders as defining citizenship. (I am not sure as to what the Canadian citizenship status of them is as far as Canada is concerned either, and a Google search did not help.)

Willis said that often we define ourselves by "I don't want to be like that." She described being in Fortnum & Mason's when an American woman started talking very loudly to her husband about "Hey, Harry, look at all the teas they have here." So when the clerk stepped over to Willis, she immediately said to him, "Bon jour, monsieur, . . ."

Hopkinson said she was tired of people saying, "We're Canadian; we don't have any culture." Someone called out, "Try Newfoundland." Hopkinson insisted, "There is a there there." Dupuis felt that most Canadians accept Canada as a mosaic rather than as the United States archetype of the melting pot. (These days, I think that is true of the United States as well.)

Willis said that if the United States and Canada were similar, it was in part due to the porous border between the two, and that one of the best things about North America was the porous borders. Bruce

Catton, she claimed, said that the 20th century is a transition to whatever culture is in flux.

Someone in the audience felt that the United States-Canada relationship had both "the reality of a friendship and the reality of a hostility." Willis felt that science fiction was ideal for examining this, because "you can talk about all these great issues and no one knows you're talking about them."

Live Thog's Masterclass
Friday, 1800
David Langford

Description: "Thog's Masterclass is the department of Dave Langford's sf newsletter 'Ansible' which showcases 'differently good' lines from sf and fantasy -- the literary equivalent of a blooper reel. Dave's solo 'Live Thog' presentation has brought fear, loathing and giggles to British, US, and Australian cons, and now makes its Canadian debut."

Categories included "Mysteries of Anatomy", "Eyeballs in the Sky", "Flowers of Rhetoric", and "The Purple Prose of Cairo".

A few quotes:

A book blurb described the book as "too scary to read in the dark."

"He swept the antechamber with the eyes of a trapped animal."

"And maybe his lack of pretense was no pretense at all."

"The tension is thicker than the gravy."

"They rushed like lemurs toward destruction."

"Her English accent would have cut glass, even in the Highlands, where pewter or pottery was more traditional."

One thing that Langford does that the Kirk Poland competition does not is that Langford skewers everyone. Authors whose lines were quoted by him included Brian Aldiss, Poul Anderson, J. G. Ballard, Stephen Baxter, Arthur C. Clarke, Kim Stanley Robinson, and even Canadian Robert Charles Wilson ("It was an Everest of understatement.").

We had to leave early to catch the trailers for upcoming films.

Trailer Park
Friday, 1900

Unfortunately, this was run by someone local with a stack of tapes and DVDs, so there were things not cued up, menus to be navigated, and a lot of things that were not upcoming trailers and were not interesting (such as coming attractions for direct-to-video stuff). [I later found out that this was probably a last-minute replacement, as the afternoon session had some explicit sex scenes run, and the person in charge was summarily replaced.]

Trailers included "Batman Dead End" (short), "Timeline" (based on the Michael Crichton book, 26

Nov 2003), "Underworld" (19 Sep 2003), "Good Boy!" (<0 Oct 2003), "The Wizard of Speed and Time" (1995), "Pirates of the Caribbean" (an example of something that no one there was really interested in seeing because they had all seen it--and the movie--already), "Matrix Revolutions", "Bubba Ho-Tep" (only festivals so far), "Duplex" (Danny DeVito, 26 Sep 2003), "The Pigeon" and "Return of the Pigeon" (two really stupid shorts), "My Boss's Daughter" (in release and no relation to SF at all), "American Splendor" (about Harvey Pekar, in release), "The Medallion" (Jackie Chan, in release), "Texas Chainsaw Massacre" (the remake, 17 Oct 2003), "Jeepers Creepers 2" (in release), "The Incredibles" (animated, 5 Nov *2004*), "Gothika" (24 Oct 2003), "Once upon a Time in Mexico" (third "Mariachi" film by Robert Rodriguez, not SF, 12 Sep 2003), "28 Days Later" (in release), "Starhunter 2300" (TV series), "Battle Queen 2020" (direct-to-DVD), "Replikator" (1994?), "Star Trek: The Doomsday Machine" and "Star Trek: Wolf in the Fold" (yes, the original "Star Trek" series), "The Hulk" (another unnecessary old trailer), "Animatrix" (direct-to-video), "Mutant Aliens" and "Hair High" (one old, one 2004 Bill Plympton), "Master and Commander" (not SF, 14 Nov 2003), "Decoys" (Canadian release 15 Sep 2003), "The Order" (in release), "Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets" (more groans from the audience), "Matrix Revolutions" (again), "Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers", "Six: The Mark Unleashed", "The Haunted Mansion" (Disney, Eddie Murphy, 26 Nov 2003), "Peter Pan" (25 Dec 2003), "Looney Tunes Back in Action" (14 Nov 2003), "Kill Bill" (to be released in two parts, 10 Oct 2003 and 20 Feb 2004), "Shaolin Soccer" (no general release set yet), and "Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King" (17 Dec 2003).

This was a poor imitation of the usual item about upcoming films, which limits itself to films of interest that have not already been released, is technically adept, and sometimes includes more information, such as when films will be opening.

(Mark's much longer write-up of this session is at <http://www.geocities.com/markkeeper/trailers.htm>.)

Globalization and Anti-Americanism

Saturday, 1000

Russell Blackford, Harry Harrison, Justine Larbalestier (M), Paul Levinson, Mike Moscoe

Description: "The popular concept of Globalization is commonly of homogenization of many facets of life: choice of music, food, clothing are increasingly become less varied, and seemingly more American. Is anti-Americanism an outgrowth of the growing tide of Anti-Globalization, or are the two unrelated? As SF is mainly an American phenomenon, could there be a backlash against the genre?"

The two non-Americans on this panel were really very interesting--I just wish they could have had more microphone time.

Larbalestier began by saying that there are so many different Americas, and that all too often the administration (government) of the United States gets (mistakenly) conflated with the people. Someone in the audience said that Hollywood, music, and CNN are what people see and they judge by that. I will note that a closer look would show a lot of that is actually not American-owned. In fact, someone mentioned that Rupert Murdoch, for example, was an Australian who recently became an American, but Larbalestier said, "In his soul and his heart, [Murdoch] was an American from the day he was born." (This does sound a little like a Catch-22.) (See "Cultural Globalization Is Not Americanization" by Philippe Legrain at <http://chronicle.com/free/v49/i35/35b00701.htm> for more details.)

Levinson said that we (the United States) do not force our culture on people, but that they choose it.

Someone responded that the United States sells itself really well. Harrison felt that a major selling point was vertical mobility, which he claimed was invented by the United States.

Blackwood said that he felt that globalization is a good thing, but that there are some problems. Globalization, to him, is the mobility of labor, of products, and of capital. But the mobility of capital can work to subvert labor relations laws.

Harrison said that the people fighting against globalization have lost, because globalization is here. Moscoe said that the Internet is all over the world, and "if you want to stop globalization, stop your modem." Levinson added, "Globalization is not homogenization."

(In this context, I will mention that the National Yiddish Book Center has digitized all their books and is doing print-on-demand, but is now planning on putting PDFs up on the web, free, for all of them as well. This, they claim, will make Yiddish the first language whose literature has been fully digitized and made available.)

An audience member agreed that the Internet gives people access, but that economic globalization "goes to the lowest level." Someone else said, "Globalization is good in theory, but there is a certain assumption that there is a level playing field." For example, price supports and government subsidies in one country can give it an unfair advantage in a global marketplace. Larbaestier said that all countries have subsidies in some form.

Someone said that rather than comparing "wages there to wages here," we should compare "newer wages there to older wages there."

Elizabeth Mayne Hull noted that what is often called the "cultural imperialism of English" is seen as a good thing by many others, who like having a common language.

The question of global government and global standards arose, when one audience member spoke against them, and another said that one reason for anti-Americanism was that the rest of the world perceives a double standard in the United States policy, on the one hand wanting people to follow United Nations mandates and global accords, but on the other wanting to exempt itself from whatever it does not like, such as the Kyoto agreement and the World Court.

Someone in the audience said that they were offended by the American panelists' use of the word "frogs" to refer to the French, to which Levinson replied, "Take it easy; words don't matter." This from a writer? In fact, I thought the two Australians were far more polite and reasoned than the Americans in general, and tactics such as calling the French "frogs" was unlikely to generate much sympathy or defuse anti-American feelings.

Alien Sexuality Saturday, 1300

Bridget Coila, Glenn Grant (m), Lawrence Schoen, Robert Silverberg, Amy Thomson

Description: "Frequently, alien sex is depicted as being exactly the same as human sex, with differences in superficial biology only. But what if the Venerians are not just us with bad haircuts and bigger, say, ears? How might truly alien beings enjoy sex? Assuming "enjoy" is the right word."

[50 people]

Thomson said she was on the panel because "I'm fascinated by reproductive biology." And the first question asked was, "How would aliens enjoy sex?" Thomson said that enjoyment of sex is not

necessary. Most animals do not enjoy sex--consider bees. Silverberg came up with an even better example: consider praying mantises. Humans enjoy it, but use that enjoyment for social pair-bonding rather than strictly for reproduction. We need to think about alien sexuality in terms of animal behavior, at least as a start. Schoen said that we could look at alien sex either in terms of reproduction or of enjoyment.

Silverberg said all this led to the fact that before we could discuss alien sexuality, we needed to define sex, and proposed the definition of "the meeting of gametes for reproduction that involves the interchange and change of genetic material for the next generation." This rules out a lot of things loosely called "sex", and also rules out the various forms of mitosis, parthenogenesis, etc. But it includes such things as in vitro fertilization. This is in some sense contrary to the popular concept of separating sex and reproduction, of which Silverberg noted, "I've been quite successful at that for many decades." Instead, Silverberg defines sex as reproduction (or at least the attempt at it).

He then asked whether we could come up with some process for this reproduction that does not exist in some species on earth? Coila thought not--there is a lot of weird stuff here. She mentioned the "ameboid sperm" of sea anemones, and the fact that salamanders can change sex. (I wonder if that is what inspired Ursula K. LeGuin's "The Left Hand of Darkness"?) Silverberg added that some arthropods have detachable penises, and that fish reproduce without physical contact. (For that matter, modern technology means that some people do, too.) But a species requiring more than two sexes is unknown here. Why is that? Was it inefficient? Un-evolutionary?

Grant thought that one problem was the logistical difficulties in assembling the right number and type of partners. (If with two sexes, one has a 50% chance of a random meeting being reproductively useful, with three sexes, a random three-way meeting has a 22% chance.) Grant said that Peter Watts, a Canadian science fiction writer with a degree in the ecophysiology of marine animals, has explained this at length in his works. (Though someone in the audience later claimed that "The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex" by Charles Darwin claims that slime molds have 13 sexes, of which 12 are male.)

Silverberg thought that the other direction was more likely: "Parthenogenesis saves you the whole dating process and the cost of theater tickets." But the drawback is that with parthenogenesis there is no evolution, no change (save by random mutation).

Thomson gave an example of a "weird" animal reproductive technique. A cat's penis is barbed, and when it is withdrawn after copulation ("retromission"), the pain stimulates ovulation, hence making conception more likely. However, she noted that this makes artificial insemination a bit on the tricky side. While this isn't much of an issue with cats, it is with horses, which demonstrate the same characteristics. Grant noted that salamanders reproduce parthenogenically, but still need pseudo-copulation to bring about ovulation.

Addressing the evolution/change question, Thomson also said that most endangered species have no diversity and are on islands where they have become very inbred. She recommended Tim Birkhead's "Promiscuity: An Evolutionary History of Sperm Competition", leading Silverberg to quip, "Check out 'Promiscuity'", Amy Thompson says." (Lord, that's hard to punctuate!)

Silverberg reminisced about a hoax bid for something to be called Virginvention (in the Virgin Islands) in 1964, for which they advertised "sterility dances" on the beach. He also described watching two Galapagos tortoises mating (he figured they'd finish around February), and the fact that giraffe penises are two to three feet long. Someone in the audience volunteered that elephants have prehensile penises. Coila said that marsupials have forked penises and the female have dual uteri. Thomson talked about penis-fencing in slugs. Slugs are hermaphroditic, and the winner gets to be the male. Also according to Thomson, a pig's ejaculate is mostly gelatinous, probably to block other sperm from getting through afterwards. (I have not verified any of these amazing facts.)

Silverberg returned to the question of the number of sexes, asking whether we could create a biological reason for three (or more) sexes. Coila pointed out that cuckoos need other birds as nurturers, plant pollination requires insects, and there are insects (such as digger wasps) which lay their eggs in other insects. Any of these might be useful lines to follow.

Silverberg and Thompson said this suggested two gamete providers and one womb provider. Schoen thought this might be useful in a scenario where the womb provider is then sent out to colonize a new area. Coila thought you could even have mitochondrial DNA exchange with the third partner, something humans don't have. Thompson said that in cloning, the fertilized nucleus is placed into a third-party egg. Silverberg had the idea that the third party (womb provider?) could provide the chemicals that would trigger cell duplication. Grant said that all this would have to be species-specific to make evolutionary sense--somehow you would need to block other species from using your gestators.

Silverberg pointed out that three gamete contributors will exhibit a lot more change in each generation than one gets with only two. In fact, thinking about it, he didn't think that multiple sexes would have a regression to a mean in appearance, which would be problematic. And an audience member observed that multiple gamete providers would mean that beneficial traits would show up in fewer offspring, and hence have less chance of propagation.

Thompson said that "Storyteller" (sorry, no author or other reference given) has a species that changes sex, but becoming female and reproducing kills you. (One assumes that they have more than one or two children each gestation.) Grant asked how much people read into this sort of thing regarding its applicability to humans, to which Silverberg responded, "The advantage of being twice your age is I don't have to give a damn about PC." Thomson said, "If I let my politics dominate a book, it's not as good a book. It has to be true." She did suggest that there are evolutionary reasons for menopause (or rather life after menopause) and homosexuality is to have more care-givers, but Silverberg pointed out that until recently, life expectancy was shorter than the average age at menopause. (One could argue, of course, that there has been a natural selection for those whose life expectancy was longer by providing them with more caregivers in the form of grandparents.) Schoen sees these features as "sexual back-up plans", sort of like roach parthenogenesis.

(It may be worth noting that a very complete attempt at a taxonomy for science fiction ideas turned out to have no category in which one could put LeGuin's "The Left Hand of Darkness".)

When Is Big Suddenly Too Big? Saturday, 1400

Cary Conder, Alixandra Jordan (m), Pierre Pettinger, Sandy Pettinger, Jacqueline Ward

Description: "Costume presentations are getting larger; more people; bigger props. This is leading to a number of concerns. Do large presentations have an unfair advantage over single costumes? Do larger presentations mean smaller Masquerades? This will be a 'debate', with questions and answers afterwards. All weapons must be checked at the door."

[10 people]

This is an example of programming in an area I do not usually follow, but which I wanted to sample. Luckily, this panel was being held in the Convention Centre, rather than in the Royal York Hotel. Even so, the audience barely outnumbered the panelists.

The Pettingers work as a team in costuming, doing groups averaging eight or nine, but sometimes as large as eighteen. Ward and Conder tended to do individual costumes.

Ward said one advantage of individual costumes (or disadvantage of groups, depending on how you look at it) is that one needs to multiply the nervousness by the size of the group. It is also cheaper and easier to find a single person to wear a costume than to find a large group. (Apparently these days a lot of costumes are worn by people other than their creators.) She said that the rule of thumb is that each side of a costume provides fifteen seconds of interest, and she makes hers multi-sided or multi-layered in order to get enough interest for them to stand on their own. And, she added, if you run out of time before the costume is finished, it is easier to pull out and re-schedule. Conder agreed and added that in a group presentation, if one person freezes, you lose the whole group. Sandy Pettinger also admitted that with a large group, you also need more people to construct the costumes and props.

On the other side, Pierre Pettinger said that a big group gives you more flexibility than an individual or dual costume. For example, if you want to do "the Greek Gods" or "the Fellowship of the Ring", you need more than one or two people. It is also easier to "fill the stage", though he added that one can get carried away in this direction. He cited a presentation of E. E. Smith's "Wedding on Clovis" which had twenty-five people on a stage too small and too high. The presenter had been told the stage would be larger, but when the problem was discovered, it was too late, especially since the presentation had been scheduled for ten years. Pettinger said he would have cut several of the characters (bridesmaids, etc.), leaving only the bride, the groom, the minister, and the other three major characters, but not everyone agreed with this option. Conder said one should always plan for a smaller space than you are told.

As noted above, large presentations often are years in the making. The Pettingers' presentation for this year was originally scheduled for Chicon 2000, but had to be postponed. Getting everyone at the same convention, along with all their bulky costumes, especially in times of economic hardship, is a major undertaking. There apparently are some last-minute fill-ins or replacements, but this is very difficult if they need to do any sort of interaction with the other characters.

Conder said another problem with large groups is that all his friends have their own ideas about what they want to do, and that even if they decide to work together, they each need to get used to the stage, the choreography, etc., as individuals as well as buying into the general guidelines. ("You're not a God of War if you schlep," as Sandy Pettinger put it.)

Pierre Pettinger said that in a large group it helps if they let the people do their own work to his and Sandy's specifications. This lets them feel more ownership of the result, but he added that you need to be careful who and what you allow.

In answer to "when is big too big?" Ward said that a presentation is too big if it crowds the stage, loses cohesion, or loses the audience's interest.

In answer to a suggestion to split the categories by size as well as novice/journeyman/master, Pierre Pettinger said that the problem is where to make the split. (Shades of the Dramatic Hugo, anyone?)

Although they specialize in groups, Pierre Pettinger did say, "I have a problem with people who throw people on with no reason except to have more people." And Conder admitted, "And sometimes one is too few." (For example, just Porthos really would not work very well--you need Athos and D'Artagnan as well.)

Ward agreed that the "wow" factor is easier with a group, and the rest of the panel added that they see too much "pretty dress syndrome", where someone just comes out and stands there. (Silly me, I thought this was the main idea of the masquerade. Clearly it has mutated into something more dramatic over the years, though see below on hall costumes.) Sometimes this is because the taped music was lost, and everyone agreed one should bring several copies of whatever audio accompaniment one is using.

I asked how, if masquerade managers have no idea what is coming, they can keep masquerades a manageable size. After the panelists saying that was a real can of worms, Pierre Pettinger said that that was a real problem in the 1980s (LAcon II in 1984 had 120 entries), and awards for "hall costumes" were instituted in order to shorten the masquerade. People who previously had entered the masquerade with no presentation other than "here's my costume" could now be recognized without taking up masquerade time. Also, costumes best appreciated close up had a better chance at an award. Many masquerades have (un-advertised) cut-off points, based not only on audience endurance, but also Green Room size, time allotted for tech rehearsal, and time in the hall before rules kick in double- or triple-time pay for union workers. (This year, the need to ferry participants up to the ballroom in the one freight elevator was a factor as well.)

Someone else said that earlier school starting times were making Worldcon masquerades shorter as well, as some costumers were forced to drop out. However, this will not be as much of a problem in 2005 and 2006. And increasing costs can drive people out. Conder said that three Jedi hall costumes cost between \$400 and \$500, and one stage gown last year was \$600.

Ward said that large group had another, unintended drawback--audiences get to see only one group of thirty masters instead of thirty individual masters.

Dangers of Accelerated Genetic Manipulation

Saturday, 1500

Bridget Coila, George Flentke, Matthew Jarpe, Susan Smith (m), John Wilson

Description: "Centuries of dog breeding have produced countless non-viables (pit bulls with breathing troubles, golden retrievers and German shepherds with bad hips, etc.). A little-regarded news story a few weeks back predicted that, for similar reasons, bananas will totally disappear from supermarket shelves within a decade. What makes us think accelerating genetic manipulation (by playing directly with DNA) will lead to better results for plants, animals -- or humans?"

Jarpe and Smith began by saying that they thought the description for this panel, and other panels as well, seemed a bit biased in terms of which side the description writer was on. Smith felt that genetic manipulation would not lead to worse results than the sort of selective breeding that is being done now, because moving a single gene at a time is better than breeding for genetic manipulation and changing a lot of genes in a large population. Flentke added that in standard breeding practice, you need to do back-crossing to stabilize your population. This takes a long time and large numbers to achieve any noticeable effect.

It also takes a while to discover any problems. Wilson pointed out that Holsteins have been bred to produce so much milk that they cannot eat enough to maintain themselves and produce this milk. The result is that they live much shorter lives, but this was not immediately obvious. Broiler chickens take 35 to 39 days to reach market size, but you cannot get much further with just breeding.

Coila said she would take the contrary position. She worries, for example, that pest-resistant genes put into plants might get into weeds, making them much harder to kill, or that genes put in as viral vectors might transfer to others. (In regard to the latter, she mentioned "The Changeling Plague" by Syne Mitchell as a book which uses this idea.)

Jarpe said that he wanted to talk about the banana claim in the description. First of all, the only type of banana we have here is the Cavendish banana. There are many other types of bananas, and none are anywhere near having this problem. Bananas are one of the first domesticated crops (approximately 10,000 years ago), said Jarpe, "And we still can't get a banana that's good for more than about six hours." The survival problem is that all bananas are basically clones of each other, and

hence have no genetic diversity. Jarpe said that Jared Diamond's book "Guns, Germs, and Steel" explains why domestication of crops is difficult, and the difficulty is why we have one domesticated banana. (Do plantains count as a domesticated banana?) But now with genetic manipulation, domestication is easier, and we will have fewer monocultures. And as Wilson noted, "Monocultures are inherently unstable."

Flentke said that in the 1960s corn smut almost entirely wiped out a couple of lines of corn. This led Smith to talk about corn. One culture, she said, discovered another which seemed healthy and seemed to be that way from a new grain which did really well back home. But soon after they began growing it back home, people started going mad. The product was corn, which replaced rye as a staple, but while rye was high in the amino acid tryptophan, corn was low. And tryptophan is necessary for producing niacin, which prevents pellagra, which causes the "three Ds": dementia, diarrhea, and dermatitis. Why didn't the Indians have this problem? Because they ate the corn fresh when it still had the tryptophan. Flentke added that corn was also worse for dental health because it was far more sugary than rye.

Wilson mentioned Monsanto's "Golden Rice" with extra vitamin A, but Jarpe said that genetically modified foods are "a really neat product looking for a market." Flentke thought some were more promising in that regard than others. For example, high-yield crops require a lot of fertilizer. If we use genetic manipulation for things like nitrogen fixation, we can improve the yield without requiring more fertilizer.

Jarpe said that wheat, maize, rice, and potatoes are the big-money crops, so genetic modifications in other crops may be more affordable to the small farmer.

Smith asked whether the consumer has a moral role in all this. "People want cheap food," she noted. And Flentke said that even the organic producers are mega-corporations now.

Someone in the audience asked whether, since genetically modified crops are monocultures, they would not be as susceptible as "natural" monocultures. Jarpe pointed out that genetically modifying a grain does not change the fact that a lot of the original genotype is still around.

I pointed out one problem was that courts have ruled that corporations own the rights to their genetic modifications, even to the extent that if their seed drifts into a neighboring field and fertilizes those plants, that farmer must pay the corporation if he wants to use the resulting seed. Smith said that unintentional spreading is one of the biggest concerns regarding genetic manipulation.

Someone asked whether people would object as much to removing genes as to inserting them. One possibility along these lines is manipulation to make crops that can grow in harsh conditions more edible by removing genes that make them poisonous. Someone said that subtraction is not riskless; the pineapple *plant* is very toxic even though the fruit isn't.

Audience members said that their concerns included the fact that people have no idea now of the smell of a real rose or the taste of a real apple or a real tomato, and that no one seemed to be concerned about the effect on animals. In regard to the latter, Smith said that DDT had been developed to combat malaria, which kills millions, but because it was not endemic here (Canada/United States), "We have decided to let the children suffer and die to save the birds."

Jarpe pointed out that one safeguard is that with genetic manipulation, we can go back to the original strain, while with selective breeding we cannot.

An audience member reminded us that the fact that the same gene increases the tendency for sickle cell anemia while decreasing the susceptibility to malaria just demonstrates the complexity of the system.

Regarding those worried about animals raised in factory conditions, Jarpe suggested, "Maybe we should genetically manipulate these animals to be anacephalic so they won't be unhappy." (I'm not sure how serious he was.)

Flentke closed by noting that two-thirds of the soybeans raised in the United States are genetically modified, but they are not a big food crop, so no one cares.

The Multiple Implications of Teleportation on Society
Saturday, 1600
Ctein, Harry Harrison, Wil McCarthy, Mark Olson

Description: "In many models of teleportation, the transported individual is destroyed and reconstructed as part of the process. What are the social, legal, and religious ramifications of this tempting technology? How would society deal with the possibility of accidental duplication of its citizens? With a routine technology of death and resurrection? Should backups be kept? And if so, what are the mutual legal exposures of a person's various 'versions'?"

This sounded interesting, but when Harrison began by talking about his experience with manual analog computers ("the biggest problem was backlash in the gear train") and then launched into a long description of the Norden bombsight, I concluded that this was not a panel that was going to stay on topic very well. So I left.

50th Anniversary Hugo Ceremony
Saturday, 2000

NOVEL

"Hominids", Robert J. Sawyer (Analog Jan-Apr 2002; Tor)

NOVELLA

"Coraline", Neil Gaiman (HarperCollins)

NOVELETTE

"Slow Life", Michael Swanwick (Analog Dec 2002)

SHORT STORY

"Falling Onto Mars", Geoffrey A. Landis (Analog Jul/Aug 2002)

RELATED BOOK

"Better to Have Loved: The Life of Judith Merrill", Judith Merrill & Emily Pohl-Weary (Between the Lines)

DRAMATIC PRESENTATION, SHORT FORM

"Buffy the Vampire Slayer: 'Conversations With Dead People'"

DRAMATIC PRESENTATION, LONG FORM

"The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers"

PROFESSIONAL EDITOR

Gardner Dozois

PROFESSIONAL ARTIST

Bob Eggleton

SEMIPROZINE

"Locus", Charles N. Brown, Jennifer A. Hall & Kirsten Gong-Wong, eds.

FANZINE

"Mimosa", Rich & Nicki Lynch

FAN WRITER

Dave Langford

FAN ARTIST

Sue Mason

Other Awards:

John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer [Not a Hugo]:

Wen Spencer

First Fandom Hall of Fame Awards:

Philip Francis Nowlan

Philip Jose Farmer

Moskowitz Achievement Award:

Rusty Hevlin

E. Everett Evans Big Heart Award:

John Hertz

Seiun Awards for Best Works in Translation:

Novel: Robert J. Sawyer, "Illegal Alien", Masayuki Uchida

Short Fiction: Greg Egan, "Luminous", Makoto Yamagishi

Torcon 3 did better than Chicon 2000, but still had one misspelled name on the slides.

In his Hugo acceptance speech, Sawyer thanked J. K. Rowling for being late with the latest "Harry Potter" book (originally due out in 2002), and the Hugo administrators for declaring Neil Gaiman's "Coraline" as a novella. As he put it, "I was never so thrilled by a word-count statistic in my life." It was nice that Sawyer won his first Hugo in Toronto, because almost his whole family was present to see it.

**China Mieville and Kim Stanley Robinson in Conversation
Sunday, 1000
China Mieville, Kim Stanley Robinson**

Description: "A conversation between these two famous authors." [250 people]

This is the sort of panel that I go to panels hoping to get. My only complaint was that I could not take notes fast enough to get it all.

Robinson began by saying that this conversation was taking place in "the possibility space in which

neither of us won the Hugo."

He then said that in London there exists a zone which is not the city center but is not the suburbs either, and that Mieville seemed to base his works there. Mieville agreed somewhat, and said he found smaller cities more amenable, in particular that cities of fewer than three million people are "really sweet." He tends to like the parts of London that are Zones 2 and 3 on the transit system, which is the zone where the Underground begins to emerge and start traveling above ground (even though it is still called the Underground). It is an area of deprivation and garage music, and an area not covered very much in literature.

Robinson asked him, "How does that lead you to the form you chose? Is that a fantasy space?" Mieville said that he was an urban novelist rather than one who writes about huge open spaces and red dust (referring to Robinson's "Mars" novels). He asked Robinson in turn, "Do you consider yourself a Utopian novelist?" to which Robinson replied, "Yes, I'm very didactic." But Robinson added, "I just want to write good novels." He described Utopias as traditionally being "an empty box," but said that it does not have to be that way. "Not only can the world be different, it *is* going to be different."

Mieville agreed, saying that the argument that Utopia is boring is of the most pernicious ideas. He noted that Marx said that the people who say that Utopia would be like a factory--and hence undesirable--are almost always the factory owners. Robinson said that even a Utopia need not be painless--it could be even more painful "from human hurts rather than animal hurts." Mieville thought that was likely, because if the other (animal) level is not there, the inter-personal level is all that more intense, and cited Robinson's "Pacific Edge" as an example of this. Robinson said that part of this was literary: "As an author, you can flog your character like Job."

Mieville quoted an Italian Marxist (whose name I did not get) as saying, "The fact that there is no need for people to die of hunger and that people still do die of hunger is presumably of some interest."

Of the statement "Americans have no sense of irony," Mieville said, "It irritates the living shit out of me." Haven't these people seen "The Onion" or heard of Mark Twain, he asked.

Speaking about art as propaganda, Mieville said, "Most propaganda isn't good art. Mine, on the other hand, . . ." Though usually he writes as art, not as agitprop, he does feel that the politics make the works better in general. Robinson asked, "What about a novel with no politics? Can this be a good novel?" He noted that even Proust's "Remembrance of Things Past" has political overtones regarding the Dreyfus affair, and then answered his own question by saying, "Art is a response to our social situation. It is always politicized." But he wants the author to be sympathetic to all the characters, not just those with whom he agrees politically. He dislikes writing which shows a disdain for one point of view. "It is important," he said, "to be fair to all points of view." (He must hate what passes for political discourse on the radio these days.)

Mieville agreed that fairness is desirable, but said it is also difficult. He particularly admires Steven Brust for doing this with his "Vlad Taltos" series, where he does not make people total villains. Michael Moorcock was another author who achieves a level of balance, he added.

Someone in the audience asked if "Years of Rice and Salt" was not really science fiction. Robinson replied that had he won the Hugo, "I was ready to refer to Philip K. Dick's 'Man in the High Castle' last night." But he added that alternate history is always part of science fiction, and also of fantasy, and if any case, "Years of Rice and Salt" was a Buddhist novel anyway. The rule he suggested was, "If the word 'planet' appears in a story--it doesn't matter when or where it appears--the story is science fiction." He observed that the same question could be asked of Mieville's Hugo nominee "The Scar", but asked, "How is that different from Jack Vance?"

Mieville felt the attempt to put a dividing line between fantasy and science fiction was doomed. Yes, the division between Robert A. Heinlein on the one side and David Eddings on the other was clear, but there is a lot in the middle. For starters, he named Jack Vance, Gene Wolfe, David Lindsay, and H. P. Lovecraft.

A broader definition of fantasy, he suggested, would be that "all fantasy literature is a literature of alienation," and that the authors "put a scalpel to the skies of the everyday." There is also a surrealist tradition to deal with, but there is a core that is shared across genres (here referring to science fiction, fantasy, horror, etc.). He finds amazing the scholastic debate on whether "The Scar" is science fiction or fantasy. Someone told him, he said, "What you write is science fiction that masquerades as fantasy." (An audience member said that there was definitely a debate among the judges for the Arthur C. Clarke Award over its categorization.)

Robinson did not entirely agree, saying that he sees science fiction as prophecy in a way fantasy is not. (So alternate history is science fiction because it prophesies what would have happened given a beginning set of conditions.) "What I love about science fiction," he said, "is its stance as prophecy that you can't just toss aside when you're done."

Mieville felt that most of the fantasy written today is somewhat degraded, saying, "Fantasy often replaces history with moralism, but traditional fantasy didn't do this." Continuing about history, Robinson said, "Real history has been highly implausible." There are no real rules to be applied to alternate history, he claimed, though people believe there are. For example, some people believe that history is created by individuals (the "Great Man" theory) while others claim that there are trends (the "Tide of History"). (I would observe that Asimov rather attempted to have it both ways, with psychohistory being based on trends, but with the admission that a single character such as the Mule could disrupt everything.) Robinson said, "I don't think there are any [laws of history] except that the bigger armies win." (And of course, even that is not always true.)

Mieville said he thought Jon Courtney Grimwood's "Arabesk" series was a very good recent alternate history, combining the Ottoman Empire with cyberpunk. He felt that the claim that the author was "cheating" in an alternate history was meaningless as a criticism. Only if the "cheating" disrupts the reader is it valid. (But of course this varies from reader to reader.)

Someone asked about the lack of religion in Mieville's works. He replied that traditional fantasy deals with gods, but "I'm not desperately interested in religion." He did say he was interested in it as "part of a social matrix or backdrop." Later, he added, "I don't get very involved in the pornography of theology." Robinson asked, "This is kind of a London thing, right?" (Actually, I think it applies to most of Europe these days.) Mieville noted, "You have to do a lot of God-bothering [if you are the United States President]." Robinson said that his book had more religion, in fact quite a bit as the basic structure, because "the book made me do it," but also because of the influence of Buddhism in his own life. He said that Gary Snyder was his main influence. (Snyder was the subject of Jack Kerouac's "The Dharma Bums".) He also said he became interested in the Muslim religion from writing about Muslims in his "Mars" books, so that became part of "Years of Rice and Salt" as well. He also noted that "Years of Rice and Salt" was written before September 11, 2001, and observed, "[All] Middle Eastern monotheisms are prone to excess." Regarding whether he felt that he could write successfully from the point of view of a character of a different race, gender, or religion, he replied, "We're all alienated from each other."

Someone in the audience opined that scientists could not be apolitical. Robinson said, "Science is a utopian project that is unaware of it." Mieville said that the way science operates is complicated, and that it is the uses, promotion, etc., of science that is worrisome, not the research or knowledge itself. However, he decries the "elitist snootiness about other people's fears" that he senses among the scientific community. People are fearful because they have been lied to in the past about various scientific facts. For example, they were told beef was safe when it clearly was not.

Robinson felt that a Marxist analysis of science was helpful. "If DNA is being owned, this is a danger," he warned. But nothing will defeat capitalism, and science is its only opposition.

From the audience, David Hartwell asked if science fiction has become more overtly political in the last ten years. Mieville felt that British science fiction has become, if not more overtly political, then at least more politically savvy. Robinson said that early science fiction writers as H. G. Wells and Olaf Stapledon were always political. The first big break in science fiction was that in the 1950s of Gold, Knight, Kornbluth, Pohl, and others from John W. Campbell, and that was definitely political. Then in the 1960s, there was another break between the New Wave and the traditionalists, also political. Early fantasy writers such as E. R. Eddison and David Lindsay were not political, and that politicization was not always present in fantasy, but now fantasy has its political elements as well.

Mieville said that there was a political position in the visionary traditions of George MacDonald, Christian visionary traditions, and gnosticism, a sort of "grass-roots counter-hegemonic." For example, of MacDonald's writing he said, "'Lilith' is a shat teringly dissident book."

Someone asked about how their attitudes had changed, noting that William Gibson, for example, seems much less pessimistic over the future than when he started writing. Robinson said that the question was meaningful for him, but "For China, that would be such a short time ago." He said he would like to say that he is more optimistic, "but as global capital increases its stranglehold, the world's in worse and worse shape." He is, however, optimistic in science. Mieville said that the stakes are colossal ly high, but after "Seattle in 1999" (the collapse of the Third Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organization in Seattle in November 1999), he is more optimistic.

Are Universities Obsolete?

Sunday, 1200

Bruce Burdick, Deb , Gay Haldeman, Dr. Elizabeth Anne Hull

Description: "Kids are teaching technology to their parents and grandparents. This trend is more and more outpacing the ability of educational systems to invent, adapt, and adopt technology before those being educated have moved on to other inventions. Unless it can retain and indeed strengthen its position as a generator of new knowledge, the university's relevance to the future of our society must be questioned. (And we've got just the panellists to do it!)"

Burdick, a Professor of Mathematics at Roger Williams University, and the author of ten papers and two stories, started by saying, "If you think fans are fanatical, you should see the Euler Society." He also said that in twenty-five years of going to science fiction conventions, this was his first panel. And, as he said, "This is my only panel, so this might be my last chance."

Geisler said her qualifications included a background in First Amendment law and its implications for on-line study, but said that she avoids on-line course work. Haldeman teaches tutorial writing at MIT. (I think that is more like remedial writing than learning how to write tutorials.)

Hull taught at William Rainey Harper College for thirty years. Harper is known as "the father of the junior college." But his goal was not what we see as the purpose of junior colleges. He wanted to get rid of the "riff-raff" at the University of Chicago in the late 1800s, by which he meant the undergraduates. He wanted it to be purely a graduate school, and he saw junior colleges as a way of handling everyone else.

Haldeman say she was the only person on the panel without a Ph.D., but that she had a lot of experience teaching Spanish and also "English as a Second Language".

Hull thought that the main issue in the future of universities was "distance learning." This had been offered by some schools via television since the 1960s. (I can remember seeing calculus classes on the University of Illinois television station around 1963.) Hull said she tried them but described them as "the most miserable experiences of my whole educational experience." She missed the interchanges with other students, particularly in something like a class on Shakespeare, but said that the math course was even worse, since there was no real opportunity to ask for clarification. (I wonder how they would rank against giant lectures of several hundred?)

Geisler cited statistics showing a 10%-15% attrition rate for university classes in general, but a 40%-70% attrition rate for on-line classes. She felt that on-line classes required no commitment from students to get dressed, to go to class, etc., and this eventually became no commitment to do the course work. Ironically, she said, 90% of the students live less than twenty-five miles away. (I would point out that in many situations, that is a long way. For example, we live only about ten miles from Rutgers, but driving back from there during rush hour takes about an hour. More time is spent driving than in class.)

Hull said that the most positive comments for distance learning from students came from places like Alaska, where it is the only option. Administrators *love* distance learning--they do not need to build any facilities and can, in fact, use canned lectures that they have bought, meaning they do not need faculty either. Haldeman agreed with this, saying that for the same tuition income, universities do not have to provide tenure, salaries, buildings, etc.

(It occurs to me that the videotaped lectures by Robert Greenberg on "How to Understand and Listen to Music" probably are of this sort. We checked them out from our public library, though.)

Hull also said that there is a lack of feedback on problems, where students will assume that they are wrong rather than being able to catch when the instructor makes a mistake.

Someone in the audience described the United Kingdom's "Open University", where courses last longer than a semester, because they are assumed to be being done part-time. And tutors are dotted around the country to help people on a walk-in basis. There are also summer schools connected with this.

Hull said that the University of Phoenix does that in the United States, with many "satellite" campuses around the country, but Burdick said he would describe the University of Phoenix campuses as "learning centers" rather than universities. This of course brings us back to a fundamental question: what is the purpose of a university? Alas, the panel did not seem to want to address this directly.

Geisler said that we would always need different modes for different students. This led Hull to discuss statistics about who goes to university (which at least partially addresses the purpose). In the period from 1900 to 1940, only 1% of people in the United States graduated from university, and only 5% even attempted (attended) university. In the 1950s, 5% graduated from university and 20% attempted it. In the year 2000, 20% graduated and 80% attempted. So the percentage of people who succeed in college once they get in has stayed relatively constant, but the percentage of the population who has gotten in has gone way up. As Hull put it, "[At 80%], you're getting down to some pretty tepid bodies." It is true that some of the people are late bloomers, but that was always true. (As Hull said, is "nobody has problems any more; they have issues.") Community colleges, she said, can help reclaim the late bloomers, and she stressed that "it is important to educate everyone to the furthest extent of their capabilities. The problem is that we have made not being a college graduate a disgrace. Hull would like to see more emphasis on continuing adult education and less on getting a degree and then considering one's education finished.

Burdick said that the drop-out rate was becoming a major concern, especially since such surveys as

that of the "U. S. News & World Report" use this as a factor in ranking universities. He says that when the administrators at his school ask how they can improve their retention rate, the answer is basically by limiting admissions further--an answer they do not want to hear. Geisler expressed the problem rather ambiguously when she said, "Everyone should have the equal opportunity to flunk out if they deserve it."

Finally, someone in the audience asked directly, "What is the purpose of a university?" Burdick addressed this from a historical perspective. The first university seems to be the University of Bologna, founded in 1088. Students there hired their professors so as to have more control over the curriculum. (Previous similar schools were all Church-run.) Universities were for the elite, however; lycea taught the "useful stuff" (as he called it). These two merged back together after the American Civil War. The last big experiment--"relevant curricula", where students constructed their own courses and majors--was pretty much declared a flop when it was discovered that the students could not get jobs after they graduated. In short, it is difficult to say what a university is because it is a tradition that keeps changing.

Hull said that some define it as preparing you for a job, but that was based on the British view of universities preparing you for the civil service (as opposed to Eton and Cambridge preparing you for life as a gentleman). It was a preparation for citizenship, whereas the Platonic idea of a university would be one which prepared you for a rewarding life. She emphasized that in the 21st century, we have to cope with the fact that, because change is happening so rapidly, whatever we learned in university will not be enough.

Geisler said that a university was "not so much a repository of knowledge so much as a place where people can exchange knowledge." (And this is clearly not the case with most distance learning.)

An audience member said that in computer science he saw a lot of people who were self-taught, but needed the degree pro forma. Geisler said this was not new in communications either, but also that many self-taught students *think* they know it all, but don't. Haldeman mentioned that she gets a lot of people in her tutorial writing sessions to whom she has to say, "Maybe your teacher is an idiot, but if you could put 'subject-verb-object' together you might have a sentence."

An audience member said that autodidacts can have a narrow view, but this is also true at a university.

Regarding the "job preparation" aspect, Geisler said that many parents are asking, "Will my son or daughter get a job [with this education]?" She is forced to tell them, "No amount of education will guarantee a job."

Burdick went back to the idea of lifelong learning, and said that part of the function of a university was to help you learn how to learn, and those 3AM arguments in the dorm were a vital part of this. Distance learning cut that out, as well as the whole issue of socialization.

Does Alternate History need a Science Fiction Element?

Sunday, 1400

Alexis Gilliland, Scott Mackay, Mark Rayner, Robert Silverberg, Charlie Stross

Description: "Is an alternate history most effective when it involves a science fictional element -- e.g., giving automatic weapons to the Confederates, or scheduling an alien invasion at a pivotal point in time -- or is it just as interesting to craft an alternate history that hinges purely on a change in the historical timeline? And if you write the latter, is it still science fiction or simply what historians are now calling counterfactuals?"

[150 people]

There was no designated moderator for this, so the focus tended to drift.

Scott Mackay (who pronounces his name "mah-kigh") wrote "Orbis", in which aliens control the Roman Catholic Church. He said some people consider it non-fiction.

Gilliland said that everybody writes alternate history. For example, the Serbs and the Croats each have their own version of history. Silverberg noted that it is said that it is the winners who write the history, but in that country they are all losers. Silverberg said the question seemed to be between alternate history in its "pure form" (Abraham Lincoln does not get assassinated) and science fictional alternate history (Lincoln does not get assassinated because aliens put a force shield around him at Ford's Theater). Which is better? Well, this is asking really, "Which is a more effective method?" and Silverberg said, "It could go either way." Poe described a short story as a story in which one thing happens. Silverberg commented that for a science fiction short story, it is more "One unlikely thing happens." So if aliens arrive *and* Lincoln is saved, that is two things. One can get a stimulating story with the kitchen sink approach, he said, but it is not really effective and it is often unnecessary. Again, he noted, this is talking about short stories.

Stross said he felt it was a mistake to try to cram all of alternate history into two categories. He seemed to see three equally important categories. One was the science fictional category, such as Harry Turtledove's "World War" series. Another was the purely historical "macro-counterfactual" where there was an order not determined by human actions, such as S. M. Stirling's "Peshawar Lancers". And a third was one in which individuals can affect history. He also suggested George Orwell's "1984" and others as another category (ex post facto alternate histories, I guess). He also mentioned Niall Ferguson's "Virtual History", one of the many collections of counter-factual essays that have been appearing lately as history and alternate history become more popular.

Mackay said that personally he enjoys alternate histories with science fiction more than those without. Counter-factuals, he said, need a more educated audience and so from an author's point of view may not be as profitable.

One audience member expresses a general feeling about which type was better/best by saying, "It depends on how well it's written."

Silverberg said that Poe's comment should really be "One thing happens and then you face the consequences." A lot of alternate histories do not do the second part. Silverberg recommended Murray Leinster's "Nobody Saw the Ship" in this regard. Gilliland said that one problem with this is that changes cascade until "you might as well be writing an imaginary history." Mackay felt that one needed to follow it up entertainingly rather than rigorously.

Rayner said that there was yet another type of alternate history, one in which fictional characters (e.g., Flashman) interact with history. This gets dangerously close to including all historical fiction, of course.

Silverberg said that alternate histories can have the sin of over-subtlety. In his "Trips", for example he tried to have thirteen universes in 12,000 words, but suspects the reader may not have noticed all of them. Even at the longer end, though, Mackay said, "A novel should aim for one effect as well as a short story." Silverberg said that in a novel one would have the initial "thing," but would then the novel "unfold to elaborate on the theme in various ways."

Silverberg made reference to Leo Tolstoy's "War and Peace" as an example, and Gilliland said that he had a vision that after Tolstoy turned in the manuscript, the publisher asked for a sequel, to which Silverberg responded, "'War and Peace: The Trilogy.'" Someone asked about the fact that a massive

divergence was really "fake history." Silverberg answered, "It's all fake, baby. We just make this up; that's why it's fiction."

One audience member compared reading alternate history to another art form: "It's like listening to jazz; it's improvisation on a known theme."

Referring to the over-simplification of history that some seemed to think necessary, Silverberg said, "It is unnecessary to eviscerate a story to entertain the reader," and adding, "The more you bring to a book, the more you take away from it."

Someone in the audience observed that alternate histories seem to concentrate on scenarios where things are worse and asked why this was so. Stross responded gleefully, "Because it's fun!" but Mackay noted somewhat more seriously that a story needs conflict, and it is much easier to do this in a scenario which is worse than the current world than in one which is better.

Someone else said they found the "Emily-Dickinson-meets-Daniel-Boone" type of alternate histories unsatisfying. (Someone else noted they would not have liked each other anyway.)

Mackay observed that there was a difference between making how the alternate history works itself out the main story, and making an alternate scenario the backdrop of a story not directly related to it.

Gilliland summed up by saying that alternate history was "hard to do, little pay-off--this is a science fiction writer's life." Silverberg agreed somewhat, but with a silver lining, when he said, "Howard Waldrop is not a rich man but he seems to be happy and he's popular among those who like that sort of stuff."

Silverberg also thought this panel was somewhat pointless because alternate history is science fiction by its very nature.

Sidewise Awards Sunday, 1500

This went fine except for Torcon listing Robert Silverberg as one of the panelists. Who knows what they were thinking.

The nominees were:

Long Form:

Gary Blackwood, "The Year of the Hangman"

Martin J. Gidron, "The Severed Wing"

Christopher Priest, "The Separation"

S.M. Stirling, "The Peshawar Lancers"

Harry Turtledove, "Ruled Britannia"

Short Form:

Charles Coleman Finlay, "We Come Not to Praise Washington"

John Kessel, "The Invisible Empire"

William Sanders, "Empire"

Robert Silverberg, "With Caesar in the Underworld"

Walter Jon Williams, "The Last Ride of German Freddie"

And the winners? There was a tie for Long Form between Gidron's "The Severed Wing" and Turtledove's "Ruled Britannia", and Sanders's "Empire" won for Short Form. (Gidron's book, from a small press, assumed no rise of National Socialism in Germany and was based in a thriving Yiddishkeit culture in New York and Europe.)

Dinosaurs: Reality versus the Movies Sunday, 1700

[no description provided]

Brett-Surman is the paleobiology expert at the Smithsonian Institute, and the co-editor of "The Complete Dinosaur" and "The Jurassic Park Field Guide to Dinosaurs".

He began with a series of "little-known" facts, including:

- | in most cases dinosaur education in the schools stops at grade 3
- | Tyrannosaurus rex and Stegosaurus were separated in times by 85,000,000 years
- | most species last an average of 5,000,000 years
- | the Linnaean system of classification went out ten years ago and was replaced by cladistics
- | there is no such thing as "the dinosaur"--a category containing "primates, rodents, rabbits, bats, and camels" would be as diverse as "dinosaurs"

Brett-Surman said there are many filters that serve to block information. The first of these, he said, is the Discovery Channel, along with Hollywood and television in general. "Education is their excuse, not their goal," he said, and as a result they end up "having dinosaurs doing things only a crazed wolf would do." Even those that have paleontologists as advisors do not keep them "on call" and so narration, typically the last thing done, is not checked by the advisors.

An example he gave showed a reptile urinating to mark its territory. Reptiles do not use urine as a way of getting rid of wastes.

The only error-free television show, he claimed, was David Suzuki's "The Nature of Things".

Where can one find accurate information? Well, there is always the Web, but it is unfiltered. He recommended (not surprisingly) the Smithsonian site, and also the University of California Museum of Paleontology site. (Not all university museums are to be trusted, though--the University of Oklahoma has billboards advertising the "World's Largest Brontosaurus.")

Most museums, he said, have their labels at an eighth-grade level. Referring to the fact that for decades the American Museum of Natural History in New York knowingly had the wrong skull mounted on its apatosaurus skeleton, Brett-Surman described its curator, Henry Fairfield Osborn, as "one of the towering megalomaniacs of the last millennium" who threatened the museum with damage to its reputation if they mounted the correct head.

The original 1926 film of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Lost World" was mostly accurate, he said. But then he also claimed that Hollywood had dinosaurs stomping cities, and this is not really fair. In fact, there have been only six English-language films with dinosaurs in cities: "The Lost World" (1926), "The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms", "The Giant Behemoth", "Gorgo", "Jurassic Park II", and "One of Our Dinosaurs Is Missing".

In terms of movement, Brett-Surman said that "Jurassic Park" was the most accurate, but dinosaurs were reptiles and as such had limited behaviors. The coordination with others and general

intelligence shown, particularly in the sequels is quite inaccurate. As he put it, "They can't act as a SWAT team." While it is likely that a lot of our understanding will change with new discoveries, the raptors were the smartest of the dinosaurs and still had undeveloped cerebellums, and new discoveries cannot override this. Dinosaurs also did not have the ability to run faster than twenty-five miles an hour, which means the jeep could easily have gotten away from the Tyrannosaurus rex.

(There is a list of all movies with dinosaurs at <http://www.dinosaur.org>.)

Brett-Surman admitted that birds were close relatives of dinosaurs, and that some birds showed quite a bit of intelligence, but said that intelligence in birds is different from intelligence in mammals. Reptiles do not think, he said, "How can I mess with this person's mind?"

What he would like to see as a first step in better public knowledge and education is a final paleontologist check of scripts. He felt this was especially important since dinosaurs are often a person's first exposure to mystery, adventure, science, geology, biology, and physics. And dinosaurs are an excellent antidote to science phobia.

He recommended a few books: "The Compleat Cladist" by E. O. Wiley, D. R. Brooks, D. Siegel-Causey, and V. A. Funk, "The Complete Dinosaur" edited by Brett-Surman James O. Farlow (an undergraduate-level text), "Dinosaurs: The Encyclopedia" by Donald F. Glout, and "The Encyclopedia of Dinosaurs" by Philip J. Currie and Kevin Padian. He also liked this year's fiction Hugo nominee "Bones of the Earth" by Michael Swanwick.

He quoted someone as saying that paleobiologists and paleontologists are "coroners to the long dead, coroners where the evidence has been left out in the rain for 65,000,000 years and the witnesses are long dead."

Romancing the Philosopher's Stone
Monday, 1000
David Stephenson

Description: "The romance of philosophy and science may be lost on the layman, but never on the enthusiast - come hear fellow space aficionados speak about the things they love."

[30 people--and for Monday morning for a panel that had moved from its original time, that's not bad]

In one final (for me, anyway) program cock-up, this description bears absolutely no relation to the panel. (And it got the spelling of "aficionados" wrong.)

Well, Stephenson is a retired astronomer, so maybe that was what confused the programmers.

Stephenson began by saying that science fiction "is a much broader tent indeed," and that it includes spells and incantations. He quoted Clarke's Third Law: "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic," and suggested the corollary, "Any technology used without sufficient understanding will be considered magic."

He then talked about real spells as used by alchemists and others. These involved undergoing purification rituals including fasting, going to some secret place, lighting candles and incense, and chanting for hours. All of this will end up creating a physiological state which leads to hallucinations. For example, black candles (often specified) had dried animal blood or dried menstrual blood ("the deluxe version," as Stephenson described them).

There were also psychochemical considerations. Gnomes these days are often pictured in garden ornaments on toadstools that are red with white spots. This is the Fly Agaric, and has hallucinogenic properties. As Stephenson explained, "If you nibbled a bit of Fly Agaric, you too would see gnomes, and not just in the garden." More than a nibble would make you berserk--the Vikings used it before battle. It is a close cousin to the "Death's Angel."

Stephenson reminded us that we are separated from the Age of Magic by an enormous gulf of about 1300 years. People of the time were illiterate, and even if they were literate, probably had no access to writing materials. And being literate at all made you a bit suspect.

All this leads to non-written methods of information retrieval. Spells were always rhymed, making them "self-checking." (Stephenson compared it to a built-in cyclical redundancy check.)

He also described what is called "medieval mind theater." This involved taking a familiar scenario and filling in visually punning images as a way of remembering them. It is claimed that some people using this can remember up to a thousand items accurately. So apparently strange images in spells, he said, refer to items or stages, but the code for these has been lost. (For example, "green dragon" refers to a certain herb, but we no longer know what it is.)

And chanting or singing is a good method of timing things when you do not have accurate clocks. (I am reminded of the old Victor Borge joke about playing "The Minute Waltz" three times to get a perfect egg.)

As for the philosopher's stone itself, it was two things. It was a material which, when alloyed to a base metal, would produce gold. It was also a symbol or allegory for the quest to transmute the human soul. However, in order to get the funding they needed, alchemists tended to emphasize the "gold" part to their wealthy patrons. They also needed to be able to convince them that there was a possibility that they could find such a material.

There were known alloys at the time. For example, tin and copper alloyed to make bronze. And if you took sphalerite and heated it until you got a white ash, then combined that with carbon and copper and baked it, you did get a shiny metal--brass--although not of good quality. This was a step in the right direction.

Stephenson reminded us that the ancients may not have been as knowledgeable as us, but they were not stupid either. The search for the philosopher's stone would not have been carried on for nearly two thousand years if no progress were being made. There were always rumors of some place where they had cracked the secret. Stephenson mentioned "Arabia, rich in Frankenstein," which got a big laugh and a quizzical look from him. (He meant "frankincense" and thought that was what he had said.) People had been sailing from Arabia to India and back since 2000 B.C.E., and India had high-quality brass and lots of it. In fact, the images of their gods were done in the "five metals", which are gold, silver, copper, lead, and zinc. And the key to good brass is elemental, metallic, pure zinc. (Brass is an alloy of zinc and copper.)

Normally to get a pure metal, you take a sulfide of that metal, burn it to get the oxide, and then heat it in a charcoal furnace which extracts the oxygen from the ore by creating first carbon monoxide and then carbon dioxide. But zinc boils at 915 degrees Centigrade, while its oxide does not burn until 950 degrees Centigrade. It can be done, but the quality of the zinc is not very good.

Now Zawar in India (south of Udaipur) has zinc mining, but rather than use the separation process described above to obtain the pure metal, they used retorts to capture vapor as a layer of pure zinc on the inside. And this, Stephenson said, was the philosopher's stone: zinc. "What a let-down!" he added, that the secret should be "a downward distillation of zinc in a reducing atmosphere."

But without good brass, Stephenson pointed out, there would have been no Industrial Revolution because there would not have been a steam engine. Brass is versatile, durable, precise, non-corroding, and non-magnetic. "[So] zinc has been our philosopher's stone, unsung and unknown."

He added that while in the West, we used charcoal for reducing atmospheres, in the East they used cow dung, which is lighter and faster. So he concluded, "Think of the philosopher's stone and the secret of its magic. It's a load of bull shit!"

Miscellaneous

Well, that was Torcon 3. Massively disorganized, it still managed to have its high points, and I seemed to have missed its lows. (I heard later that the Masquerade started forty-five minutes late, and had its half-time show halfway through the first run-through, as well as having very confused exiting procedures.) For more details on how it was run, or mis-run, see Cheryl Morgan's report in "Emerald City" (<http://www.emcit.com/emcit097.shtml#Wheels>). (Of that report, I have to say that 1) it is the sort of report I love to read, and 2) it is the sort of report I would hate to write.)

Next year is Noreascon 4, and I am not the first to say that it will be a relief to have a massively experienced committee organizing it rather than a committee with a lot of very sincere, but inexperienced folk. Los Angeles (Anaheim) won the bid for 2006, possibly on the basis of having the more experienced committee (over Kansas City). Next year's voting for 2007 should be interesting. The Columbus group has a more convenient location, but Japan has a more interesting location, and there is a feeling that maybe it's time for a Worldcon in Japan. The next year is probably a good time to look at the credentials of the two committees fairly closely. As Cheryl points out, lots of stuff doesn't scale up from a large regional to a Worldcon (even a small Worldcon), and Worldcon experience can be critical.

See you next year in Boston!