

The Texas SF Inquirer #37

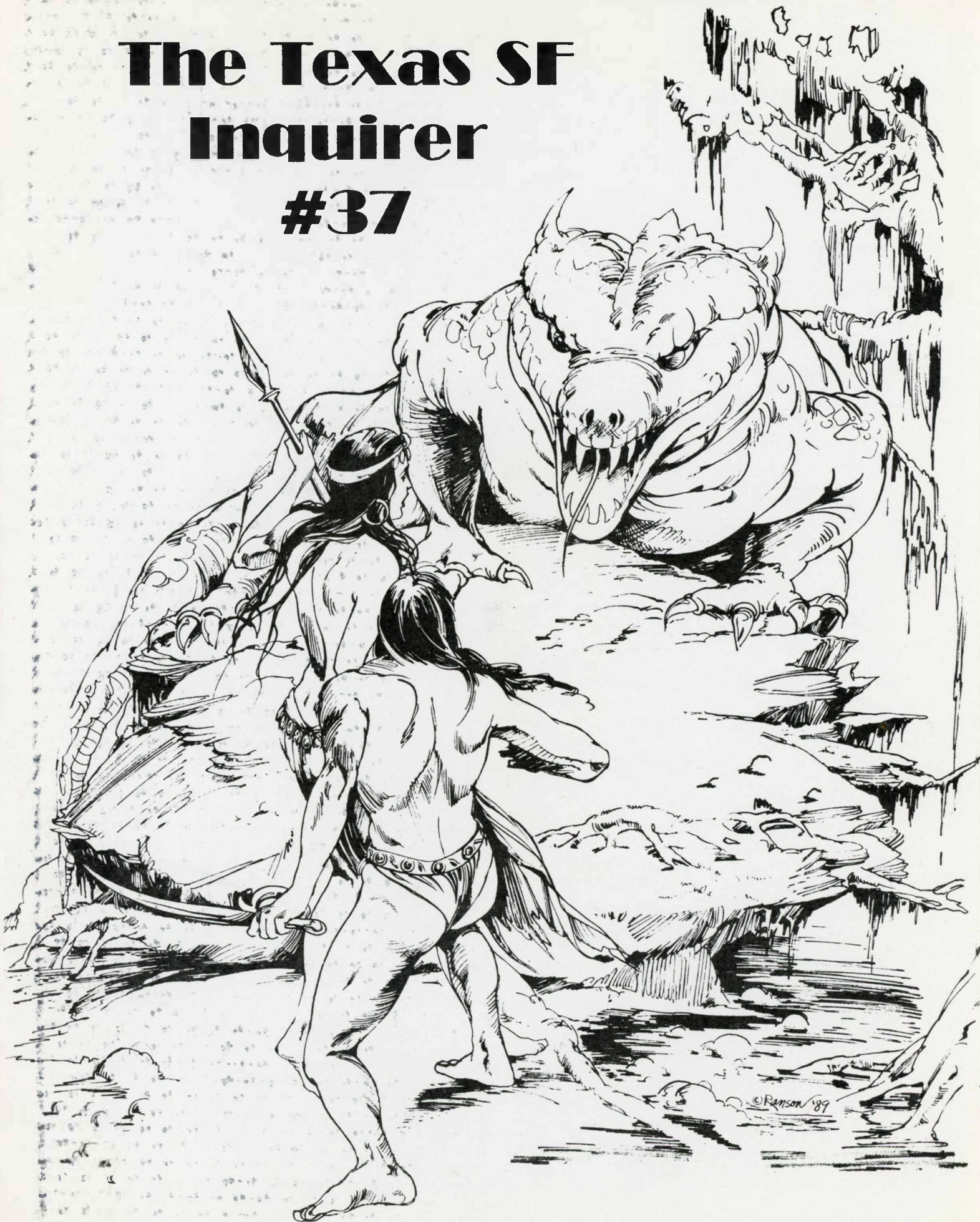


Table of Contents

Up the Creek:	
Editorial by Dale Denton.....	3
Texas Two-Steps:	
An Interview with Katharine Eliska Kimbriel	
by Carole Nelson Douglas	4
Upcoming Conventions.....	10
From the Recliner	
by Edw. A. Graham, Jr.	11
Trades List	12
Alex on Art by Alexander R. Slate	13
SoonerCon Report by David Thayer	14
SoonerCon by Alexander R. Slate	15

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**Editors: Dale Denton &
Alexander R. Slate**

Welcome to Issue 37 of *The Texas SF Inquirer*. How's everybody doing on their New Year's resolutions? Have we begun to trim down, firm up, quit various vices and bad habits, etc. *ad nauseum*? Are we continuing on these new programs?



Congratulations to those who have, and our sympathy for those who haven't. Don't worry, we won't tell on you. It takes a lot of effort to change the status quo, and doubly so if it's suppose to be good for you.

For my own part, I have cut way back on drinking soft drinks. It really wasn't hard to do. All I had to do was lose my job (see editorial a couple of issues back). I did most of my drinking of soft drinks on the job, and rarely bought them at the grocery store for home consumption. I just kept with that habit afterwards.

Along that line, my expenditures have dropped dramatically as well. Just in soft drinks, it adds up to \$45 a month, and that doesn't include eating out, buying computer stuff, partying, buying computer stuff, dating, buying..... well, you get the picture. All that was cut back (money-wise, anyway) considerably, though the computer has gotten more of a workout than ever before. Now if I can just get a job.

Good luck to all of you working on keeping those New Year's resolutions. Take it one day at a time. That seems to be the best way to get through these troubling time.

On a sad note, Don Thompson long-time fan editor and publisher of *Don-o-saur* died last month of cancer. He is survived by his wife Carolyn and several children.

Meanwhile, we hope you enjoy the issue.

-Dale & Alex

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Up the Creek

Editorial by Dale Denton

War in the Persian Gulf. I know--this is old news now. It really is amazing, the way we get the war on the news as never before. Watch it play-by-play, with up-to-the-minute reports. It really is a scary thing. No, not the war (though it definitely is also, so don't get me wrong). I mean the news media. Yeah, that's what's scary.

First, it was amazing. CNN News scooped the news world, broadcasting live from Baghdad, giving us a literal play-by-play of the opening minutes of Desert Storm, even before the President made his public statement. Regular shows were stopped, and everyone was telling us about the war as it was happening, or as they heard it from CNN. This showed the news media at its best and at its worst.

Among its best were the reports direct from Baghdad, while its worst was the grabbing at unsubstantiated reports, just to try to get maybe a little ahead of the other networks, only to have that report be false an hour later. What was most upsetting, and continues to be today is the total disregard the reporters appear to have for the safety of the men and women in our armed forces. Still being unemployed, I've gotten the opportunities to listen to many of the daily military briefings to the press. The questions, and more importantly, the attitudes the reporters advance during these press conferences scares me. The military already seems to be giving way too much information out which could be useful to Saddam Hussein, yet the reporters are belligerent and confrontational when they don't get information on what is next to happen, or on information which nobody at all familiar with military operations would expect them to have yet.

What really amazes me the most is the total ignorance of military matters that most of the press corps displays. It isn't like nobody knew that Desert Shield might well turn into Desert Storm months before it happened. I would expect professional reporters to have brushed up on their military knowledge prior to the January fifteenth deadline, so that they might at least sound knowledgeable about their subject. However, this doesn't seem to be the case.

Still, the scariest is their attitude. Top reporter Sam Donaldson summed up what seems to be the general attitude of the reporters. When he was told that the general public seemed to think that the reporters were getting more information than they needed to broadcast publicly (and therefore to the enemy), he replied that it was just too bad that we felt that way, and that he would just continue to get all the information he could.

Another reporter, about the same time, acted in a like manner, going to one of the first Israeli SCUD attack sites, and broadcasting exactly where it had hit, thus allowing the Iraqi to re-determine their trajectory coordinates. For some reason, Israel didn't like this and cut the him off in middle of his broadcast. Too bad their national security had to come before one of the networks making a few extra bucks for the scoop. Oh well.

I guess the most frightening part of the attitude of the news media is the indications and inferences that they can alter the public opinion about the war. That is what is really alarming, because in all honesty, they may well be right. And that scares me to death.

To conclude, I'm including an excerpt from a letter from Cpt. Jim Hutson, a fan who is presently in Saudi Arabia. "I get awakened by the sounds of Patriot missiles going off to meet SCUD. Actually, it's not nearly as bad as the media makes it out (few things are). When the alarm goes off, I roll over, grab my gas mask, put it on, and roll back over in the bunk. After the ALL CLEAR is sounded, I take off the mask and go to bed. (I can't sleep with the damn thing on. I feel like the guy in ALIEN with the creature on my face). Other than that, the SCUDs ain't much to worry about (at least as long as they don't start carrying chemicals and the Patriots keep working)."

By the way, I saw a couple of interesting notices about the war. The first was a marquee in front of a local business. It read, "Support our troops, not the newscasters." The second was a bumper sticker, which said, "If you aren't a Patriot, then you're a SCUD."

Katharine Eliska Kimbriel

Interview by Carole Nelson Douglas

This is the second part of our first Texas Two-Step. Last issue, Kathi interviewed Carole; here, Carole interviews Kathi. We hope to have more of these Texas Two-Steps in future issues.

Carole: You favor large canvases and casts of characters in your fiction.

Kathi: Sometimes. In my werewolf stories, I've been dealing with a very, very small group of characters. I've been writing those more as young adult things, but they're for all ages. But I have done a couple things where they're very isolated.

Carole: Does this bring special problems in theme and in the technical complications? Is it harder to evoke the theme on a broader scale?

Kathi: That's an interesting point because, to a certain extent, theme arrives almost simultaneously with the world and the character. **Fire Sanctuary** was born of the question: what would happen in a society where people could not only survive but thrive in a radioactive environment? What kind of people would that breed, and what would happen if there were helpful mutations? I read an article on wiring a bone break with a battery to speed up healing, and I thought, what if you could control current, what if that became a positive mutation and the myth of the healing hands was the real thing? And out of those two things came Ronuviel, came the idea if it's genetic, if 80 percent of the population is sterile, even if they survive this catastrophe, fertility would be of the utmost importance.

Yet how would you keep the society from locking up their fertile people as pampered breeders? What kind of society would you build? And that's what I started doing, building that society. It was a huge canvas, but there were certain things I wanted to examine thematically, like the one that's coming out at Christmas, **Hidden Fires**. My whole description of that book, when people ask, is it's about revenge and misplaced trust. It has a fairly large canvas. It refers in passing to the large extended families that are going on there. It has three points of view, it has several important supporting characters that are not point-of-view characters, and yet I feel that each one of them is a facet of the

theme that's going on, about trusting, not trusting, did you trust too much here, did I not trust enough? Did I trust even though circumstances looked to the reader like I should not have trusted, and on and on. And what is the price for revenge? My themes are actually tied to these large characters.

Carole: I was saying the fantasy world is a metaphor of the issues, the characters, the themes embodied in the characters--

Kathi: I hadn't thought of it really that way until you said that, but to a certain extent that's true. There are certain things I'm examining about the metaphor of power in the fantasy that I'm writing right now--that I haven't been able to sell. It has very much to do with the society of these free-wheeling people who are totally ruled by their biology, and yet (this is) the only way magic manifests among them. There are three very simple types: They have seeing; speaking, the gift of prophecy; and healing, which they consider magic. It's not really, but they consider it magic. And then there are the actual mages that are born among them and they're always elementals. If they're mages, they tend to control one elemental power, but they are such a hysterical, pendulum people in many ways that I feel it's very appropriate that their power manifests itself in elemental forces of the planet.

Carole: You really seem to be interested in the notion of biology as destiny. (laughs)

Kathi: I suppose in a sense that's true, and a lot of it has to do with a lot of medical problems when I was younger, and most of them were medical problems that science did not recognize at the time.

Carole: As medical problems?

Kathi: Right. Chemical allergies. I had severe chemical allergies to things like cigarette smoke, that were not recognized at the time, where people weren't talking about it. It's certainly not something you test a 10-year-old girl for, the fact that her mother was a chain-smoker and that's what was making her so sick all the time, was

giving her migraine headaches and things like that. I had the interesting experience of talking to a counselor at an early age, so I was able -- you know, when you couldn't figure out what was wrong medically, you send 'em to a shrink. The simple problem was almost 90 percent of the case: it was biological. The other ten percent was just growing up. I had PMS; I had Endometriosis, which I'm still fighting today; I had Candidiasis which is a fungal disease which can totally upset the chemistry of your body, which can be controlled with diet, acidophilus and a few other things. All these things led to almost psychosis on my part, it felt like at times, although I was never, of course, court-certifiable, but there were days and times when I felt like I was losing my mind, which is why I had such an introspective childhood in some ways.

Carole: It was all biology, the outward trying to impose on the inward and saying what the inward is and being wrong.

Kathi: And I suppose, maybe, I haven't thought about it that way, but maybe I'm examining social issues from the point of health care almost excessively. People come up to me and say, when are you going to start a family? Well, I have, I've written three books, and those books took me nine months to write each, and I kicked them out into the world and I wring my hands over them just like you do when you send them off to school on the first day --

Carole: And the publisher dresses them in a ghastly cover and --

Kathi: -- in an ugly, ugly cover, and I think, oh God, they look horrible in that color, in that kind of thing --

Carole: You haven't had bad covers, though.

Kathi: I've been very fortunate. Overall, I've been very happy with Warner. I had a bad experience first off. **Fire Sanctuary** was sold to Blue Jay. Blue Jay was shaky at the time. They were trying to start a paperback line to go with their hardback line . . . frankly they wouldn't countersign my contract because they didn't want to have to pay me the money right then. They played games for a year and a half, and my agent finally said, this is ridiculous, I can resell this book. And so I was brave and I yanked it, and a year later Warner bought it. Although Jim Frost

was officially my editor, Brian Thomsen has been my advocate and cheerleader and best source of help and encouragement at Warner, and I highly recommend him as an editor. He is the reason (for) the push, with the great covers, and Questar automatically does half-page ads. I don't know that Warner's contracts are any better or worse than anybody else's right now, and there are things about the house I'm not happy with, but I'm very happy with Brian. I'm happy with my Don Dixon covers. My only agony is that I don't have the wall space and the money to go out and buy the originals.

Carole: You may, you may . . . someday.

Kathi: You may, if things go well, but I feel (Warner's) been supportive about the books. I just wish they were being discovered faster by the reading public.

Carole: People in the United States in the last half-decade, and worldwide, have learned about AIDS. (In your Nuala books) you're talking about as radical a potential as nuclear contamination.

Kathi: Oh, yes, it's going to take a little more research, but I have an environmental science fiction book I want to write that's going to scare people half to death. It'll probably be released as a thriller instead of a SF novel.

Carole: These issues you've investigated in **Fire Sanctuary** and **Fires of Nuala**, it's looking at how do people live with the mess that's been made of the world they live in.

Kathi: How about Typhoid Mary with venereal disease? Those people I referred to as being such an emotional pendulum. I've created a people who, literally, can be so aroused, if there's nobody around to help them, the idea of masturbation doesn't exist. It can't work for them. They short-circuit. They can die -- of arousal. If they don't have a partner there. They also can carry venereal disease, but they're not affected by it. So if they're stolen in a slavery situation, they can become infected. Matter of fact, their key to being freed is catching a venereal disease from a client, if they're kept in a slavery position, because it can't be cured, but it doesn't affect their fertility or their health. They're just carriers, silent carriers, of the Typhoid Mary tradition. So it's protection.

Carole: What you say about disease in your own background--we don't always know where our writing comes from, but it always comes from something in our own background, and that's maybe why you lean toward--I know SF was your first published book, I know you're writing fantasy--but the games you can play even in your fantasy have sort of a genetic, SF spin to them.

Kathi: I've been told that by friends who have read this fantasy novel. I haven't really had any solid comments from editors on it. It tends to be that the staff really, really likes it, but the head honcho vetoes it. I have my own theories about that now, but the people who have read it have said: these aren't elves and dwarves that have been changed, they're aliens. And I've said, yeah, in a sense they are, but I needed magic as a metaphor. I did not want simply a science that was so advanced that it was magic to the people who lived there or to the humans coming in. I wanted true magic in that these people are capable, for one reason or another, of manipulating elemental forces, but of course there's a price. Science is not violated. The laws of science still exist.

Carole: Some people who are partisan to SF feel that fantasy is cheating; fantasy is not based on real-world research, the way things work in the physical world. Fantasy is a "just snap your fingers if you don't like the color of the sky, change it" thing. You're talking about addressing the same themes from different angles in different types of fiction.

Kathi: I don't remember the exact quote right now. There was a discussion apparently at the World Fantasy Con in Seattle last year about certain issues in SF being mutable and addressable while in fantasy--fantasy dealing more perhaps with religion, or myth or other entities--these things are fixed. Greg Bear said something to this effect. I have the exact quote from Locus magazine up on my screen right now and I've written underneath, *Oh, yeah?* Because my attitude is nothing is fixed, and this is a Western viewpoint, that this is fixed. Nothing is fixed.

Carole: That may be one reason I've stayed away from religion in fantasy, because I don't think it manifests itself in what we interpret as a single religion, or a single group of beliefs or behaviors.

Kathi: I was more into, with my studies and things, the idea of understanding the Judaeo-

Christian heritage when I originally created the world (for) this fantasy, but they call their god the last god, because once this monotheistic god came into the world and became the preeminent god and tool for the main races and cultures of this society . . . basically, he/she/it--it's an androgynous god--obliterated everything else. This god was born and lived and does not die. It is not part of the cycles. Therefore no new myths have been born since it, so it is called the last god.

Carole: It's terrifying, to think of --

Kathi: Well, it is, because he/she still actively manipulates. And if the day comes I have to tell anything from the point of view of the omnipotence, I'll have to write it s-slash-he because there will be no other way to write it, unless I write from the point of *I*. This being actually has made several of--one race in particular. They do not breed, unless they find a genetic opposite, because there's a chemical--they're sterile unless a chemical reaction takes place. So when they say that active intervention is necessary by their god in order to breed, in a sense they mean it. It's not true in the sense they think it is. You know, God doesn't go zap so that they can be fertile. But it is true that this was triggered from the beginning.

They are a hybrid between two different races and as mules they would be sterile, except for this little twist in their biology. And somebody would say, well, is that really possible in genetics, and I say, no, maybe not in nature, but man is no longer bound by nature. So thinking about it, if I wish to address something like that, and I want to address it as a fantasy novel instead of writing a treatise on genetics, I wish to address the questions behind genetics. So we're going to visit it in this fantasy novel.

Carole: There's some controversy about soft vs. hard SF, which I'm always suspicious of because there's *soft vs. hard* news and only hard news is presumed to have any value, while the soft news includes ideas and people and life issues. . .

Kathi: What some of the writers say about that--Elizabeth Moon gets so angry, she says what it comes down to is if you're in Analog you must be *soft* if you're a woman who wrote it, if you're talking about anything other than space ships blowing each other out of space. Now my question is, Jerry Pournelle's degree is in chemistry. Chemistry is generally lumped into so-called soft sciences when people start playing games like

that. It's like physics is the only hard science as far they're concerned.

Carole: Have you seen or heard much of that?

Kathi: It infuriates me. But my experience so far has not really addressed that, it's been a case of going into a party when I was just starting out and talking about, yeah, I just sold a book to so-and-so, and they'll say, oh, fantasy? They just assume because I'm a woman I'm a fantasy writer. And I say, no, SF. Now, in that particular case, that was Tommy Llewellyn, Edward Llewellyn, who died several years back, wonderful, charming man--

Carole: Oh, I enjoyed him, too, and (he was) another generation also.

Kathi: His face suffused with pleasure when he discovered I was a SF writer. He didn't immediately think to himself, oh, no, a woman can't write SF. It was, oh, tell me about your world. Tell me about what you're working on now.

Carole: He was really turned on to what he was doing. It was a late life thing--

Kathi: Exactly, he was thrilled by the wonder which we are trying to--

Carole: Jennifer Roberson, on the other hand, said people at a party found out she wrote books, said what, oh, romances! The assumption is that not only does a woman write romance, but that anything that has a romantic element is trash. I have noticed that a lot of books by women writers in SF/fantasy--including mine--have erroneously been called romantic fantasy. They're not. There is a strong male/female relationship, but it's more domestic than romantic.

Kathi: It almost makes me feel like I need to write an article for some magazine. I don't know if it would be the (SWFA) Bulletin or for fanzines--it could be reprinted at will, but it would be something to the effect that: you want romance, okay, great, but look at these books. Look at things like **War for the Oaks**. Look at **Probe**. Look at all these other variables, and my question to you is, are these romantic books or are these wonderful fantasy and SF books that happen to contain an element of real relationships between the opposite sexes?

Carole: Is this something that has been missing in the genres?"

Kathi: Yeah! (*laughing*) Is that what you're trying to tell us?

Carole: (*laughing*) Is that possible?

Kathi: --that SF and fantasy hasn't contained it, and yet the great romances of the great fantasies that were written by Dunsany or by Morris --

Carole: They're very chivalrous.

Kathi: When you think of the mythos that they were dripping in--the woman as a reward for the trials that the man suffers getting to where he is (at the end)--and yet she is a fully realized earth mother character. I'm wondering, there's been this big hole, I don't know if it's because eldritch characters came in with certain writers in the twenties and thirties and they threw everything else out the door--

Carole: --or if there was a male adolescent dominance in SF for a number of decades and anything female was considered icky-icky, like a 12-year-old boy who doesn't want anything to do with girls.

Kathi: Yeah. Even C.L. Moore, her Joiry character, she could get a woman warrior through, but think back to some of her most famous SF stories, about the succubus type creature --

Carole: The evil woman, vampire.

Kathi: The evil vampire alien entity --

Carole: Woman as whore or virgin, the old dichotomy. When you write about women from a more total viewpoint, it's called romance.

Kathi: Right, but I'm of the opinion when people say to me *romance*, meaning nowadays romance, I don't even think of the sex angle so much anymore, since they're throwing so much of that into mainstream fiction and every kind of fiction. I think now of the point of view of the woman, and I got this from an editor, the way of saying it. Thinking about the situation beforehand, experiencing the situation, and then thinking about the situation afterwards, examining it and going through the ramifications. That is the thought process in the sense of a romance, the

way they want you to write romances. It's this total complete absorption and concentration on the part of the woman with her own system and her reacting to things.

Carole: Her own emotional balance.

Kathi: And even it's partly from the man's point of view, too, it's how he's responding to the woman and how he feels about the woman. So it's the old love at first sight, or love-hate at first sight and nothing else; they can hardly deal with anything else in their lives. And that seems to be what people who enjoy escaping with romance want. But I get to the point where if there's nothing else going on, that gets very boring very quickly. So that's why there's so few of the historical or the romantic suspense writers or whatever that I can read.

Carole: About the third Irissa and Kendric book, one reviewer said, now that they know each other better, the relationship has lost the spark or the--

Kathi: --the zing.

Carole: And I thought, exactly. That was a conscious decision. I didn't want to continue the series if I couldn't let them grow in the relationship. It's so easy, and almost commercially wise, to continue on that level--Nick and Nora in Outer Space, going on forever. There's a place for that kind of entertainment, that you know you're going to find exactly the same thing in exactly the same proportion and dose --

Kathi: I have that problem in **Hidden Fires**. There's an intensity of emotional response to each other between two of the protagonists, but there's no sex in the book whatsoever. There's no time. They're interrupted just before things get started once, and then they're separate for the last third of the book, and she's so injured in the last scene there's no question that there's going to be any of that going on. But these people have been married ten years. He's willing to tear a mountain down for her, almost literally at the end, if necessary, to get to her. But that's not the first and foremost thing he has to think about. He has to isolate on the fact that there are 200 lives at stake because this antimatter could blow up at any moment, and he can't worry about the fact that he doesn't know where the hell his wife is. But they are adults who accept each other on their own terms. They don't have any illusions

about each other anymore, but they're crazy about each other for the very things that perhaps other people might think that, you know, the spark'd be gone by now. She didn't marry him for the wealth and security, that was the only thing she always wanted, but she's always seeking it herself. And when she actually found it, she thought, my god, I can have a friend, too. So they went into the relationship differently than a lot of people do.

Carole: What can you do differently in SF to examine relationships? Because you definitely can, you can manipulate the world and the society around them. Your genetic questions present (your characters) with problems that are extrapolations from what we all deal with in real life. That's one of the reasons I brought up AIDS, because we don't like to think of--

Kathi: It sounds like SF of 20 years ago, in a sense. A plague that could be passed sexually that could destroy the world. And yet isn't that the actual instance of several famous SF books that were written?

Carole: And also the hubris of our time, because of our supposed development, that we would escape plague.

Kathi: And yet, nature fills a vacuum, and as we eliminate the great plagues, new things will form. Everything that used to be the great killers ninety years ago, almost all of them are knocked down the lists in the 30s and the 40s. Now heart disease and blood pressure and certain types of cancer--many diseases that may be caused by the changes we've made in our environment and our diet and things like that. All these things are tremendously important, and we don't pay any attention because life moves so quickly we don't have time to pay attention.

Carole: Anyone been particularly inspirational in your career? Any writers you've read or met? Educators? Family? Do writers require special care and feeding? And your husband is supportive of your writing, is this something inborn or learned?

Kathi: John is supportive, but he's supportive in certain way, in that he respects it, he feels that it's good, he feels that there are people out there who want to read it. On the other hand--my husband's idea of reading: I go out and I buy him Michael Kube MacDowell, one of the new writers

that he enjoys; he likes Lois McMaster Bujold, Asmiov, Clarke, Heinlein, that type of thing.

He loved the first chapter of **Hidden Fires**, but when things shifted gears with a new protagonist in Chapter Two and things (became) introspective, before the character in Chapter One arrived on that planet, he said, naw, I didn't like that. I said, how are you gonna know what happens when I start blowing up things if you don't know why these characters are doing things? I understand that, he said, it's just that I would have probably read through that very quickly to get to the next part. So you have to understand that I loved Tolkien, where my husband hated Tolkien, so I'm writing in a whole other different style than he likes.

For entertainment value, I've always liked reading people like Anne McCaffrey. For sheer power of prose and subject I read Evangeline Walton's Mabinogian series. **The Children of Llyr** and all those, I was at a very impressionable age when I read those, my teens. I was depressed for three days after I read **The Children of Llyr**. I've never had to reread it. I can still remember long passages from that one. LeGuin's Earthsea trilogy especially, also **The Left Hand of Darkness**, and her nonfiction works. I always buy her anthologies and her collections of nonfiction. I always am interested in what she has to say about the world. And Joseph Campbell. I was a big reader of fantasy, of fairy tales--Heather and Broom, Thistle and Thyme--get your hands on Beowulf!

I started reading adult books in the genre when I was nine years old. The first SF book I ever read, after **A Wrinkle in Time**, which is probably a first for a lot of people my age, was **The Door Into Summer** by Robert Heinlein. I read the back blurb on the original issue and I was fascinated. The idea of the year 2,000--that in 1970 it's possible to kill somebody legally by putting them into cold sleep, because the original book was aimed toward 1970--and I chewed my way through that. Of course I didn't understand all the sexual tensions and ramifications that underlay Heinlein's work, but I understood the plot, I understood who were the good guys and who were the bad guys and why they were doing what they were doing.

Carole: Heinlein grabs readers early.

Kathi: I feel that, in a way, Heinlein will be remembered for his juveniles, and for **Stranger in a Strange Land**. Not that his other books

have not been entertaining and thought-provoking in their turn, but those are the books that really did something for our field, and I think they'll be reprinted again and again and again.

Carole: So you read in the genre very, very young.

Kathi: To a certain extent, but I missed a lot of classics--for instance, I never read the Elrics, which were very popular--Michael Moorcock--which I could have read when I was 13 or 14. The mythos of Elric fascinated me. I heard about it and thought, my god, he's created the classic hero. But I made the mistake of going back and reading the first ones in the series sequentially. There's nothing to it. Moorcock had not come into his power as a storyteller from style. He'd come into his power from just sheer storytelling of narrative and plot at that time in creating a character. You know, there were echoes of what Elric was going to become as (Moorcock) continued dealing with the eternal champion, the eternal hero, but it was not in the very first book. I should have read **Stormbringer**, people told me, which is the last true Elric book which synthesized everything and brought it together.

Carole: You're talking again about a writer who's grown . . .

Kathi: Right. I get that even now from my own books. People say, there are things that you mention in the second book and the third book that you didn't mention in the first. And I say, you've got to remember that **Fire Sanctuary** not only had half of it edited out when I wrote it, but it also was at the beginning of the dawn of my creation, and the creation will grow. And if you wish to grow with me with it, you can.

Carole: There's a lot of bias in our field against--probably because of the fantasy trilogy --series books. What do you feel the advantages are in going back to a world, at different times, or in a sequential sense? Is there bias? Should there be? And why do it?

Kathi: I personally see no reason in not continuing to use an excellent creation as long as you're not writing the same story over and over again. There had better be growth and change in your story, or why are we doing this? If you look at David Eddings, from the first book of the Belgariad all the way to the (continued on page 12)

Area Convention Listing:

Upcoming Conventions

Feb 28 to Mar 3 **World Horror Convention**
Hyatt Regency, Nashville TN. Guests: Chelsea
Quinn Yarbrow, Jill Bauman, David Schow, John
Skipp. Membership: \$65.00 (attendance limit-
1000), Box 22817, Nashville TN 37202,
615-226-6172

Mar 2 & 3 **San Marcon**, Southwest Texas State,
San Marcos TX. Memberships: \$6 pre-reg, \$8 at
the door. SanMarcon Science Fiction Fantasy
Society, 1706 IH-35 Suite #1, San Marcos TX
78666

Mar 15-17 **Sercon 5**. Ft. Lauderdale Airport
Hilton, Ft. Lauderdale FL. Guest: Bruce
Sterling. Membership: \$35 until 1/1/91, then ?.
Sercon Treasurer, PO Box 70143, Ft. Lauderdale
FL 33307

Mar 21-24 **Aggiecon XXII**, Texas A&M, College
Station TX. Guest: Fred Saberhagen, Keith
Parkinson, Lynn Abbey, Marv Wolfman.
Membership: \$13 until 3/1/91, then \$16.00,
Aggiecon XXII, Texas A&M University, Box J-1
MSC, College Station TX 77844, 409-845-1515
Texas' longest running con.

Mar 22-24 **Neocon II**, The Downtown Inn,
Wichita KS. Guests: Pat Cadigan, Ken Keller,
Jan Sherrell Gephardt, Pat & Lee Killough,
James Gunn. Membership: \$18 NEOCON, PO
Box 48431, Wichita KS 67201

Mar 29-31 **Dallas Fantasy Fair**, Doubletree
Hotel - Lincoln Center, Dallas TX. Membership:
Bulldog Productions, Box 820488, Dallas TX
75382, 214-350-4305
Comics oriented, but also stuff for other fans.

April 19-21 **Amigocon 6**, Holiday Inn-Sunland
Park, El Paso TX. Guests: L. Sprague de Camp,
Catherine Crook de Camp, Elizabeth Moon,
Thorarinn Gunnarsson. Membership: \$15 until
4/12, then \$18, Amigocon 6, PO Box 3177, El
Paso TX 79923

May 3-5 **Corflu Ocho**, Embassy Suites, El Paso
TX. Membership: \$35, Richard Brandt, 4740 N.
Mesa #111, El Paso TX 79912
A fanzine convention.

May 3-5 **RocKon 15**, Holiday Inn at Otter
Creek, Little Rock AR. Guests: Mercedes
Lackey, Jay King, Belinda Christ. Memberships:
\$15 until 4/1, then \$18. RocKon 15, POB
45122, Little Rock AR 72214, 501-370-0889

May 22-27 **10th International Space Develop-
ment Conference**, Hyatt Regency, San Antonio
TX. Membership: contact Dr. Carol Luckhardt
Redfield, SwRI, 6220 Culebra Rd., San Antonio
TX 78240, 512-522-3823

May 31-June 2 **ThunderCon**, Central Plaza
Hotel, Oklahoma City OK. Guests: Colm
Meaney. Memberships: \$10 until 1/1, \$15 until
5/1. ThunderCon 1, 2019 Beaumont, Norman
OK 73071

*Brand new media con benefiting the Infant
Crisis Services of OKC.*

June 21-23 **New Orleans Science Fiction and
Fantasy Festival, 1991**, Clarion Hotel, New
Orleans LA. Guests: Frederik Pohl, Ed Bryant,
George Alec Effinger, Elizabeth Anne Hull,
George RR Martin. Memberships: \$12.40 until
1/1, then ?. NOSF3 '91, POB 791089, New
Orleans LA 70179-1089.

Jun 27-30 **SF Research Assoc. Meeting**,
Auburn Inn, Denton TX. Info: Edra Bogle,
Dpt. of English, Un. of North Texas, Denton TX
76203, 817-387-8216

Aug 29-Sep 2 **Chlcon V (Worldcon 49)**, Hyatt
Regency, Chicago IL. Guests: Hal Clement,
Martin Harry Greenberg, Richard Powers, Jon &
Joni Stopa, Marta Randall. Memberships: \$95
until 12/31, \$110 until 3/31. Chlcon V, POB
A3120, Chicago IL 60690-3120.
The annual gathering of the clans.

Sep 21-22 **Connipion '91**, La Quinta, Arlington
TX. Guests: Bob Tucker, Brad Foster, Robert
Taylor. Membership: Connipion '91, 2813
Cactus Drive, Irving TX 75060

Oct 11-13 **ArmadilloCon 13**, Austin TX.
Guests: Dan Simmons, Dell Harris, Pat Mueller,
Amy Stout, Emma Bull. Memberships: \$10 until
1/1, then ?. ArmadilloCon 13, POB 9612,
Austin TX 78766, 512-990-3782 (before
10PM) *The Texas Convention!*

Book Reviews:

From the Recliner

by Edw. A. Graham, Jr.

The Return of the Emperor by Allan Cole and Chris Bunch (STEN #6) (Del Rey, Nov 90, \$4.95 paperback) Rating: 3.3

This long-awaited continuation of Sten's saga in the realm of the Eternal Emperor picks up where the last book left off--the Emperor dead by an assassin's hand, the Empire in shambles, and a bunch of super-greedy idiots are at the bottom of all the mess. The biggest problem facing everyone is the lack of AM2, the super-element that allows FTL travel. The late Emperor was the only one who knew where it came from. What's an ex-Admiral like Sten to do? Especially when Mantis operatives are trying to track him down, along with his old buddy Alex Kilgour and their ex-commander Ian Mahoney. And who's this guy Raschid anyway?

In this excellent space-opera series, Cole and Bunch have taken Sten's life through some hairy adventures (most of which Sten and Kilgour would really have rather done without) and amazing reversals of fortune. If you have been an avid follower of the series, you should only be mildly disappointed. There are some obvious continuity problems (the most glaring is Ian Mahoney: his personality has changed drastically from earlier books) and the pace isn't as seamless as previous volumes. I was proud of myself for figuring out how they were going to bring the Emperor back. Nice trick, guys. Let's see what happens next, because with the Eternal Emperor back, things have a tendency to happen.

Surface Action by David Drake (Ace, Oct 90, \$3.95 paperback) Rating: 2.1

Mankind has rendered the Earth uninhabitable (dropped the Big One) and the only survivors are in the undersea domes of terraformed Venus. They're still fighting, though. The domes hire professional soldiers (mercenaries) to fight their squabbles, but only on the surface, so as to not damage the fragile habitats. One man, Senator Gordon, has a dream of uniting mankind and ending the fighting, once and for all. In order to do that, though, he must deal with the man his wife ran away with--and his son, who has dreams of being a dashing mercenary.

Told from the perspective of Johnnie Gordon, the Senator's son, this book is supposed to detail the trials and tribulations of the politics and

double-dealing existing on the only inhabited planet in the solar system. What it fails to do is bring any depth to the characters, any real purpose, and, most of all, any realism. I believe this was a valiant attempt by one of the foremost Military SF writers that just missed the mark. I respect Mr. Drake's work, but his last two novels have both displayed this same feeling of being incomplete.

Oh, well. I've run out of room, but not out of books... at least those in the review stack, the reading stack, and so on. There will be a whole different selection next time, so stay tuned...



Katharine Eliska Kimbriel (cont. from page 9) fifth book, you see growth and change in your protagonist. Now there's some problems with his new series, that have not really been worked all the way through. I don't feel it is quite as successful, but he is making an effort to make changes in the situation, to show where things just circle around and get to stay the same, and where things are actually growing and changing.

I feel the same way about it. Even my **Hidden Fires**, which is a direct sequel as far as I'm concerned, to **Fires of Nuala**. It takes place ten years later, and thematically the story is about revenge and misplaced trust. Darame's past catches up to her. It's that simple. So I'm bringing in a whole other off-world influence that has echoes back to a past that we did not see in **Fires of Nuala**. All that comes in with the free-traders stuff, it brings in the point of time where the history and the politics of the world of Nuala is about to explode. And then it doesn't even get into that. It's just on the threshold of that, and things are starting to be pulled together, where the clans are talking to each other for the first time instead of being constantly at each other's throats--except for genetics, which they haven't talked much about. Now we discover something new and different, related to trinium and relating to anti-matter, and because of that Nuala's place in history is assured. And that changes everything. So I've got a whole new thing to write about. I researched a whole new area, there's lots of stuff about hard-rock mining in this book; the last quarter of the book is totally about what's going on in the hard-rock mines.

The next book will be a sequel to **Fire Sanctuary**, but it'll take place 18 months later. I may be telling from the point of view of an alien, one of the aliens that they've been fighting in this thousand-year war that is going on in the other timeline. I'm bringing in a character who was referred to glancingly as a relative to somebody who was trapped on the planet during the attack, who is not a Nualan. Telen will be coming in and he'll have an unsuspected solution to the whole war effort, in a sense. Button, button, who's got the button, and everybody's trying to get ahold of him, because he is someone that the aliens are perfectly willing to blow up the entire world to prevent him from getting out. And he ends up ditching on Nuala and heading into the desert, so I'll be able to explore the sinis, because he gets picked up by radioactive humans. I'll be able to explore the Ciedarlian a little bit more than I did even in **Hidden Fires**.

Trades Listing

Austin Writer Vol. 10 #11 & 12
BCSFazine #210 & 211
The Colonist Vol 12, #7
DASFax Vol. 22 #12
DON-o-Saur #60
DR #67
Factsheet Five #39
Kontakt #3
NASFA Shuttle Oct 90-Dec 90
Robots & Roadrunners V.5, #4
SF Convention Register Winter 1991
SFSFS Shuttle #69 & 70
Stone Hill Launch Times Vol. 4, #10-12
Timescoop V.5, #11
Transmissions V. 13, #13
Trash Barrel Westwind #153

NEW OR NOTABLE:

OASFis Event Horizon #42 & 43
FTT #10
Sci-Fi Channel Newsletter V.1, #1
Stet #1

Chube #46

ed. Andrew Hooper & Kim Nash: SF3, Box 1624, Madison WI. The first issue we've seen in a while, and it contains a 7 page (wow!) review of ArmadilloCon.

The UnIntelligencer #1

ed. J.C. Coleman, PO Box 3194, Bellingham WA 98227. A replacement for his now defunct Life on Planet Earth. Definitely strange, with gratuitous sex, violence, and slurs.

So my argument is, if your world is rich enough and your writing is varied enough, you should be able to stay in a world indefinitely, but you can't cheat yourself. It has nothing to do with cheating the readers. Some readers would be perfectly happy to rehash again and again and again. And, to me, I feel you shouldn't even push buttons, you know, shooting for the emotional response you know you can get by getting them to love a character and then killing them off. Sometimes you do that. Sometimes you don't--sometimes it's harder to live. I personally feel that if the market wants series, I am perfectly willing to write a series. I don't think these books would have been packaged as a series, or maybe even with similar covers, in a different place and time.

Alex on Art

by Alexander R. Slate

Westercon is a good convention for art, if Westercon 43 was any example. Westercon 43 was held on July 5-8, 1990 in Portland, Oregon. The art show was held in a large ballroom in the Red Lion-Columbia River. There were a lot of different artists and a lot of pieces to see, yet the room was spacious with both plenty of place to move around in and plenty of room to stand and view the works. The ballroom was almost completely surrounded by windows and, during the daytime at least, there was enough light to see everything well. The only problem was an occasional glare if a piece was too close to a window and covered with something reflective.

I didn't count the number of artists represented, but there was quite a selection; among them Kelly Freas, David Cherry, Alan Gutierrez, Laurel Slate, Don Maitz, Clayburn Moore, and Peggy Ranson. Surprisingly, not all the artists that were scheduled had works there and there were a number of blank panels. As is usual, prints outnumbered original works. Many of the works nominated for the Bonestall (the Nebulas of the sf/f art field) were on display. Included in this number was Clayburn Moore's statue, "Mermaid" which was on display almost right at the entrance to the art show (a fine introduction to the show). There were quite a few 3-dimensional works, including some 3-D dioramas. I'd like to give special note to one very humorous piece by three people, Stanley, Villarosa, and Villa. It was a representation of a real science fiction convention art show, with various aliens viewing the works on display. But now on to this column's artist review.

Peggy Ranson is an artist at the edge of a break out. Her works have received a lot of attention recently, having been featured in a number of different fanzines during the past year. She was one of the winners of the 1989 L. Ron Hubbard Illustrator of the Future Contest (though not the Grand Prize winner).

She displayed 12 pieces at Westercon 43, all of them prints from a variety of original art media. Some of the prints were hand colored and there were a few photoprints as well. All of the works dated from 1988 to 1990, so it is difficult to make any judgements concerning her progression as an artist. Ms Ranson's work dealt mostly with fantasy themes. There were no rocket ships here, but at the same time there were no cutesy-poo dragons or unicorns, something for which she is to be complimented. Most of the

figures she drew are female in one form or another. She did a number of original variations on the theme of femininity, such as in "Psyche" (1989) a flower face of the type which will be familiar to readers of FOSFAX. Not all the figures were female (or at least not recognizable as such); "Famulus" (1990) was a black and white print that featured a magician calling forth a demon, and "Beau and Arrow" (1990) was a black and white pastoral scene that featured a leonine male along with a female human.

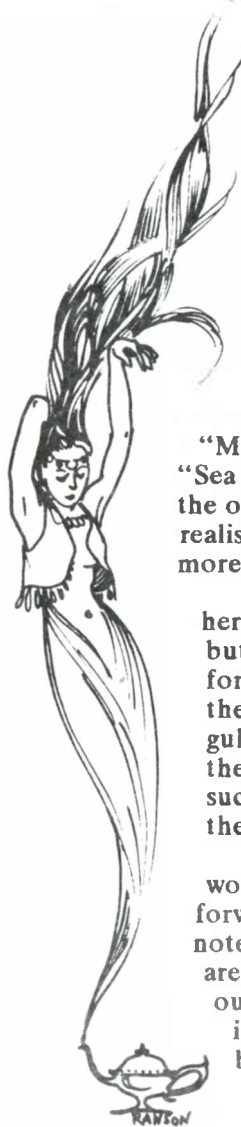
One of the things that Ms Ranson does that I like is copying the art nouveau poster style for some of her works. An example of this is "Wahine Hi'u I'a" (1990). These works portray a

central female figure and have a border, much like the works of Alfonse Mucha (known for the Job cigarette paper illustrations).

Peggy has a very nice flowing style. She also has a nice eye for color. She seems to enjoy working with pastels as she did on "Selene", "Atropos", and "Wahine Hi'u I'a" (all 1989 and all hand colored). The majority of the works were pastels or black and whites. Most that weren't were photoprints, "Mixed Metaphor" (1989), "Pearl" (1989), "Medusa" (1988). These, along with "Sea Witch" (1990) are different from the other works exhibited. They are more realistic in appearance and the colors are more contrasting and vibrant.

If Ms Ranson has one failing it is her figures. Yes they are well drawn, but they are also all a bit repetitious of form. Particularly in the face. All of the faces are long and narrow triangular faces, there is little variation to the type. Even the non-human faces, such as the demon in "Famulus", have the same longish face.

Yet this is not a *deadly* failure. The works are still enjoyable, and I look forward to seeing more of it. One final note is that Peggy most recent works are signals that she is starting to branch out into some new areas. It will be interesting to see what the future brings.



SoonerCon Report

by David Thayer

I have attended SoonerCon in Oklahoma City the last three years, my 5-year-old daughter Matilda the last two. We drove up the 200 miles from Ft. Worth to the 1990 edition in a record 2 hours and 59 minutes to arrive just in time Friday evening to attend the opening ceremonies.

At the registration table, Matilda saw the red "ARTIST" ribbon the registrar gave me to wear on my badge. She asked where hers was, pointing out rightly that she, too, was an artist, but only the one ribbon was available. The hurt look on her face prompted me to give her the ribbon and settle for a "GUEST" one.

Leonard Bishop, the con chair, introduced Lois McMaster Bujold, the Writer Guest of Honor, Alicia Austin, the Artist Guest, William F. Wu, the Toastmaster, Susan Satterfield, the Fan Guest, and Suzette Haden Elgin, the Filk Guest. Bujold gave an articulate speech stressing the big part reader feedback played in her writing. Wu introduced the other guests in the audience.

Seemingly half those in the audience were guests. After I stood when Wu read my name, Matilda asked if he was going to introduce her, too. She was upset when I told her that he was not. "Make a name for yourself," I told her though and next year the toastmaster would introduce her.

After the opening ceremonies, Matilda and I ran in to Margaret Middleton and her 6-year old daughter, Sharon. For most of the convention, the two girls sat behind Margaret's table in the dealer's room drawing pictures on 3x5 notecards and selling them to unwary fans. I bought the one Matilda drew of a strange wingnut.

I was scheduled for four panels. The first was on JapAnimation, a topic I know little about. I contributed though by reminding the other panelists of the recent highlights of American animation.

My second panel was facepainting. It was a shadow of last year's success. David Cherry and J.R. Daniels, two facepainting masters, were not on it. Even David Lee Anderson's beautiful painting of his own children failed to get the panel on track. My impression is that the panel suffered because of the ill-defined area; it was in a roped-off section of the art show room, with chairs and tables scattered haphazardly about. I offered my services to Leonard Bishop to draw a flyer to help promote the panel next year.

My third panel was on buying art. No audience showed up for it. I and the other three panelists patiently sat around for an hour chatt-

ing. The highlight was watching a costumer enter the nearby art show in a leather girdle that cantilevered her upper anatomy into a grotesque fantasy. We speculated on what she looked like in real life.

The fourth panel was a well-attended surprise in which we panelists turned the table on the audience and asked its members questions. After an awkward start, we heard lists of favorite authors, favorite books, last science fiction books read, and first science fiction books read. The authors on the panel got a good glimpse at their audience.

Saturday afternoon a cold front hit, complete with chilling rain. It failed to dampen or cool the party inside though. In fact, it seemed to enhance it, at least for most fans.

That evening, Matilda, after a hard day in the dealer's room, went to bed early. After tucking her in and making sure she was asleep, I went to the masquerade to judge. Waiting for the show to start, I watched Alicia Austin, one of the other judges, sketch a dragon on the border of her official paperwork. I asked her if I could have it after the judging.

The masquerade, with the sex and skin of the previous year absent, entertained me with its talent and costumes. I was thrilled and delighted to have a front-row seat. We judges awarded Best of Show to a large man dressed as a lavender Klingon. His spoof of Worf was masterful.

Late-night room parties abounded after the masquerade. At one, Cathy Ball reminded me of my stint as Fan Guest at a convention years before at which I goosed countless females with an umbrella I'd brought with me for reasons now unremembered. To put her on the defensive, I went down to my car and got the umbrella I'd brought with me for just such an occasion.

Unwilling to suffer a Sunday morning hangover, I restricted myself to nonalcoholic punch at the parties. I even abstained when fans passed the Jim Beam for the ritual "Smooth". I was not the only partier watching the embarrassing antics of the drunks through sober eyes, though. Harry Andruschak remained a bastion of sobriety late into the night. Loud fans clogged and littered the hall.

The next morning I collected my cartoons from the art show, delighted to discover that a friend from Texas had purchased one of my pieces. Other artists commented that the show was smaller than in previous years. Several panels, left empty by artists who cancelled at the



SoonerCon (continued from Page 14)

last moment, seemed to confirm the observation. The convention, to their credit, did pay artists for their sales in cash on the spot.

Shortly before the end of the convention, I dropped \$50 in the dealer's room, most of it at Alicia Austin's table. I did spend a few dollars at another table on Matilda for a comic book version of Disney's *The Little Mermaid*. Having learned how to read with Walt Disney Comics, I saw the purchase as an investment in her education.

Our business and pleasure at an end, I went to check Matilda and myself out of the hotel. The clerk at the front desk said I was already checked out. The hotel had mistakenly given the credit card charge for my bill to someone else to sign. I foolishly gave them my card again to correct their mistake.

Matilda and I went around to say our good-byes and finally plunged out into the cold and rain with our suitcases and other stuff for our trip back to Texas. Halfway home I realized the hotel clerk had failed to give me my credit card back. After a couple of irritated telephone calls and a week's delay, my card was on its way back to me.

The problem I see with SoonerCon is caused by the hotel it uses being small and not quite having the function space needed for a science fiction convention. A bigger hotel might solve the problem, but then the convention would not be the small and personal place to relax it now is. I hope they invite me back.

SoonerCon

by Alexander R. Slate

This was my first SoonerCon. I hope it won't be my last. It's a good small con. It has the best art show set up I've seen, with a lot of artists, and not just the same old same old. The dealers' room was very small, but there were two book-sellers. The con suite needs work though.

The programming was fun, well balanced between literary, art, media, and other. Filk has a big place in this con. Not all the programming events were winners, but are they ever? The convention was well organized and well run. The guests of honor; Lois McMaster Bujold, Alicia Austin, Susan Elgin Hadin, and Susan Satterfield, along with Toastmaster William Wu were well chosen and easy to approach and talk to.

The hotel is really a little too small for a proper convention, but I enjoyed the reasonable room rates, \$38/night. I recommend this convention.



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