

Boskone 25
A convention report by Evelyn C. Leeper
Copyright 1988 by Evelyn C. Leeper

Table of Contents:

- | [Hotels](#)
- | [Hucksters' Rooms](#)
- | [Art Show](#)
- | [Film Program](#)
- | [Programming](#)
- | [And Now for Something Completely Different...](#)
- | [Dinner: The Student Prince](#)
- | [Sherlock Holmes and SF](#)
- | [Sex and Death](#)
- | [Hobokon Party](#)
- | [I Just Read the Stuff!](#)
- | [Eastern Influences in Fantasy](#)
- | [Arthurian Films](#)
- | [SF Turkeys](#)
- | [Superconductors: The Effect on the Future](#)
- | [Fantasy by Streetlights](#)
- | [Dinner: Peking Duck House](#)
- | [Changing the Past](#)
- | [Fabulous World of Jules Verne](#)
- | [Kirk Poland Memorial Bad Prose Competition](#)
- | [Readercon Party](#)
- | [Turn of the Century Illustration](#)
- | [The Future Went Wrong](#)
- | [How to Read Better](#)
- | [Things You Should Have Read](#)
- | [The Way We Were...](#)
- | [Miscellaneous](#)
- | [Summary](#)

[Most of this is written by Evelyn. The parts of this that are written by Mark will be labeled as such as they occur.]

In keeping with the new stripped-down Boskone we didn't take Friday or Monday off. Rather, we packed ourselves in the car noon Friday and tooted on up to scenic South Hadley, Mass., where we stayed with a friend instead of in the hotel. It was just as well; the hotels were full and people were in the overflow hotel, so room space for people who had no local place to stay was at a premium. (Of course, someone who stayed with us had his shoes pissed on my our friend's cat, so he may have a different opinion!)

Much has been said about the "new Boskone" (actually the Classic Boskone, thought new mostly by those who had started attending Boskone in the last four years or so). I will therefore be brief. Boskone 24 was a zoo. There were 4200 members and who knows how many non-members, all of the latter and many of the former roaming the halls 24 hours a day looking for free booze. There were a lot of program items, a lot of costumes, a lot of planning, and a lot of problems. In an attempt to avoid the last, many of the others were cut back. Having been basically thrown out of Boston, Boskone was held in Springfield, and not advertised heavily. In addition, there was a membership cap and membership restrictions, less programming, hardly any films, no costume programming, etc. So how was it? I will describe individual aspects first, and then summarize my opinion.

Hotels

The hotel was spread between two hotels, the Marriott and the Sheraton Tara. The two are across the street from each other, and are also connected by a walkway from the Tara to Baystate West, a mall connected to the Marriott. However, Friday night the guards locked the walkway at 6 PM (when the mall closed), meaning people had a cold dash between hotels until the Con Committee got it open again. (It was below freezing outside.) The hotels were friendly and co-operative. The Tara staff dress in Beefeater costumes, so the scaled-back costumes that the convention members had couldn't even compete. Each hotel had a snack bar set up near the programming areas--coffee was only 50 cents in the Marriott, a delightful change from Boston prices! The hotels also had a lot of sofa space near the programming areas, so it was possible to sit down between items and talk to people.

The mall had a couple of bookstores, a comics store, and a video store. Unfortunately, it closed 6 PM Friday and 5:30 PM Saturday and didn't open at all on Sunday. Welcome to downtown Springfield, folks! Mark and I managed to get out for lunch Saturday and go to Johnson's Bookstore, a Springfield tradition and where we did a lot of our book-buying during our Western Massachusetts years.

I think being ninety miles away from their clubhouse forced NESFA to consider what was really necessary to bring and what wasn't. The harder it is to transport something, the more you think about whether you really need it. The result was that there was not a lot of "stuff" piled up all over the place in registration or other areas, yet everything ran as smoothly as it ever did (even before the Boskone population explosion). The badges were particularly nice--laminated plastic clip-on badges with the names lettered large enough to read from across the room.

Hucksters' Rooms

There were two hucksters' rooms, one in each hotel. This had its advantages and its disadvantages. (Talk about waffling!) The advantages were that wherever you were, you were near a hucksters' room and could browse and that people had additional incentive to go to both hotels and check out what was going on. The disadvantages were that it was difficult to shop for a particular book, since you had two widely separated areas to search, and that if you were attending a lot of panels in the Marriott (the primary programming hotel), you might not have much time to get to the Tara hucksters' room. I suspect the advantages outweighed the disadvantages and this mode of operation will continue.

The hucksters' rooms dealt mostly in books. I thought this was good, even though some people felt that you could buy books anywhere, but media items, jewelry, etc., were harder to find. I have several chain bookstores near me but I still need to travel into New York's Science Fiction Shop or Forbidden Planet to do any serious science fiction book shopping, and I found the wide assortment of books (especially older paperbacks) very useful. There were only two or three dealers who duplicated even the specialty stores near here.

I asked one book dealer how this year's business compared to last year's. He admitted it was down slightly, but also said there were about 2000 people last year he could have done without. I got the feeling he was willing to take the slight decrease in sales for an easier time of it.

Art Show

The Art Show was one of the things they *didn't* plan on cutting back, and while it was smaller than last year's, the overall quality was higher. This is probably due to the smaller attendance, and the cutback was primarily in the area of amateur art. I think the professional artists recognized that the cutbacks in Boskone wouldn't affect their sales all that much. There were a lot of panels on art; I would suggest that perhaps they should even schedule a formal artistic programming track next year.

Film Program

The film program consisted of *Excalibur*, *Radio Ranch*, *Trip to the Moon*, *The First Men in the Moon*, and *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne*. (However, *Radio Ranch* was canceled.) These were all based on literature, which is probably why they were chosen. I saw only *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne*, having seen the others before. It could have been a larger film program, but it is difficult to find films that people can't see on cable or video easily enough. I would like to see them try to find more obscure films--Lem's *Solaris*, for example, or other foreign films that can't be seen elsewhere. (After I wrote this, I discovered that they had tried to get *Solaris*, but couldn't find a distributor.)

Programming

The panels were varied. There were many that seemed to be forming an art track, and there were some hard science panels (see below), many of them about the space program or lack thereof. I couldn't attend all of them, but I will describe what I did attend.

And Now for Something Completely Different...

Friday, 6 PM

Jim Mann, Laurie Mann

This was a description of the plans for this year's Boskone. The theme was "Smaller is better," but the plan was focused cutbacks, not just across-the-board cuts. One interesting sidenote is that the dual-hotel situation, while being forced on them, led them to try to make it truly a "two-hotel" convention, rather than one main hotel and one overflow hotel. This was why, for example, there was a hucksters' room in each hotel.

Dinner: The Student Prince

We wanted to get a quick dinner between 7 and 9 so that we could make 9 o'clock panels, but we also wanted real food (not Burger King). We got the real food (at The Student Prince, also known as The Fort) but didn't quite make it back in time. The Student Prince serves good German food and I think we agreed it was worth the slight loss in panel time.

Sherlock Holmes and SF

Friday, 9 PM

Tony Lewis, Ann Broomhead, Esther Friesner, Mark Keller, Priscilla Olson, Joe Siclari

I got to this about fifteen minutes into it. The panel had enlarged from what was announced--apparently anyone in the audience who contributed in the first five minutes was drafted onto the panel. Several science fictional Holmes stories were mentioned, including the *Dr. Who* episode, "The Talons of Wen-Chiang." Other, more literary, references included John J. McGuire and H. Beam Piper's "The Return" (anthologized in the generally unavailable *Science Fiction Sherlock Holmes* edited by Norman Metcalf), Anthony Boucher's "The Greatest Tertian" (anthologized in Groff Conklin's *Invaders from Earth*), and Mack Reynolds's "Adventure of the Extraterrestrial." Worth especial note is the anthology edited by Isaac Asimov and Martin Greenberg, *Sherlock Holmes Through Time & Space*, but a complete list would be extremely long.

There are many sub-categories of science fiction Holmes stories. There are straight science fiction/horror stories with Holmes as a character, such as Richard L. Boyer's *The Giant Rat of Sumatra* and Austin Mitchelson's *Earthquake Machine*. There is even a story in the Canon of this

type: "The Adventure of the Creeping Man." There are stories in which Holmes meets various science fiction authors or science fictional characters, such as P. H. Cannon's *Pulptime* (where he meets Lovecraft) and Philip Jose Farmer's *Adventure of the Peerless Peer* (where he meets Tarzan). There are at least two in which he meets Dracula (Loren D. Estleman's *Sherlock Holmes Vs. Dracula* and Fred Saberhagen's *Holmes-Dracula File*) and another two in which he meets Jack the Ripper (horror rather than science fiction). There is also a new comic book, *Scarlet in Gaslight*, in which Holmes meet Dracula.

There are science fiction stories in which there are Holmes-like characters, such as Poul Anderson and Gordon Dickson's Hokus in "The Martian Crown Jewels" and the main characters in William Kotzwinkle's *Trouble in Bugland* and L. Neil Smith's *Their Majesties' Bucketeers*. (The children's fantasy field is represented here by the "Basil of Baker Street" books, Basil being a mouse who lives in the walls of 221-B Baker Street and solves mouse mysteries.) One final mention: *The Holmesian Federation*, a journal of Sherlock Holmes Star Trek stories.

One of the difficulties with writing Sherlock Holmes science fiction is that Holmes operates best in Victorian London. Arthur Bryon Cover's attempt to move him millennia into the future was not successful and few others have tried to move him even into the present. One reason for this anchoring is that Holmes's deductive methods would not work as well today. As one panelist pointed out, Holmes's talent for identifying people's professions would be lost--he could say that someone worked at a computer keyboard, for example, but that still wouldn't say whether they were an insurance salesman or an author.

Holmes is the deductive reasoner versus the man of action. He needs someone like Watson to play off of. (Mycroft is even less active than Holmes, of course.) In fact, most archetypes need a contrasting personality. It is well-known in detective fiction, but even in other genres it is hard to find counter-examples.

As for science fictional copies of Holmes ("Sherlock's Clones," as Joe Siclari named them), there are some which are less obvious than the Hokus and such named above. Mr. Spock and Data (from *Star Trek*) were named, of course. Esther Friesner said she would love to see Data in a deerstalker cap, and was immediately told by everyone else that it's been done already (but I can't remember the name of the episode). Someone else pointed out that there is another very famous character who is tall, thin, has grey eyes, and was supposedly (but not really) killed by a fall from a cliff--Gandalf.

Much more could be written on the connections between Sherlock Holmes and science fiction, but it wasn't said in this panel, so I will save that for another day.

**Sex and Death
Friday, 10 PM**

Ginger Buchanan, Esther Friesner, Ellen Kushner

[This section was written by Mark R. Leeper.]

It used to be there was a midnight horror that seriously discussed horror and/or vampires at a late hour. At later conventions it was still called the Midnight Horror Panel but it had really degenerated into the Midnight Drunk Panel, with more laughing (especially at things that are only funny if you are drunk) than serious discussion. Well, this year Boskone had mostly serious panels. This was the drunk panel even though it was at 10 PM. Ginger Buchanan, Esther Friesner, Ellen Kushner, and a fourth forgotten woman wasted about twenty minutes of my time admitting that none of them knew what the panel was really supposed to be about, but had a great time laughing at the fact that they liked sex. At 10:15 I told myself that they would say something of interest by 10:20 or I would leave. At 10:20 I made good my threat. [--Mark R. Leeper]

Hobokon Party
Friday, 10 PM

In keeping with the new Boskone policy, this was a closed party because they were serving alcohol. It was less crowded than in previous years, but just as enjoyable. The foodstuffs served ranged from chocolate truffles to kielbasa (after all, Springfield is right next to Chicopee, home of the World Kielbasa Festival!). One of the problems seemed to be ice, as the team they sent out to find some took an extraordinary amount of time to return.

I Just Read the Stuff!
Friday/Saturday, 12 Midnight
Robert Colby, Mark Keller, Jim Mann

We left the party to go to the midnight panel on what people enjoy reading. The title seems to indicate a fairly unstructured panel, and that was accurate. Mark Keller pointed out that many historical novels are like science fiction in that they must make an alien society seem real, and perhaps this was why so many science fiction fans were also interested in historical fiction (as witness the continuance of the Regency Dance at Boskone). Keller teaches at a junior college, which he describes as "high school with ashtrays."

A lot of this panel consisted of listing recommended books and authors. Colby (chairperson of Readercon) recommended Michael Bishop's *Who Made Stevie Cry?* and J. G. Ballard's *Empire of the Sun*. Jim Mann recommended the two Gregs, Bear and Benford. Greg Bear writes both science fiction and fantasy (*The Infinity Concerto*). Benford, on the other hand, could be described as a "science fiction fundamentalist" in that he refuses to allow even the most common "impossible" plot devices like faster-than-light travel to creep into his works. Someone recommended Ellen Kushner's *Swordspoint* (this book was recommended several times over the weekend).

Some off-the-beaten-track books that were mentioned were John C. McLoughlin's *The Helix and the Sword* (a novel based in bio-technology) and Bjorn Kurtin's *Dance of the Tiger* (anthropological fiction about the meeting of the Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon races, and described as being better than Jean Auel's "Earth's Children" series). Both of these were not marketed as science fiction, so they may be more difficult to find. McLoughlin also wrote *Toolmaker Koan*, currently available only in hardcover.

Harry Harrison's *Winter in Eden* was recommended for all the dinosaur fans in the audience--and there were many--though the panel admitted they did find it ultimately disappointing. Another "dinosaur" book mentioned was Damon Broderick's *Dreaming Dragons*. The panel then briefly digressed to dinosaurs in general, and mentioned that Christian fundamentalists find dinosaurs bothersome. As someone mentioned, the entire concept of "prehistoric" life, when the Bible claims to present history from the Creation on, is oxymoronic to Christian fundamentalists.

In general, the panelists agreed that they liked stories with good ideas, good characterizations, no glaring errors, etc., etc. This is hardly an amazing revelation. However, while a detailed background is good, a too-detailed background can sink a novel. Piers Anthony's "Bio of a Space Tyrant" series, for example, is an allegory of a Cambodian refugee that has so much background that the reader is swamped.

It was also agreed that re-readability was a valuable test of a good novel. Some classic novels mentioned that could be read and re-read were Edgar Pangborn's *Davy* and J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Of course, wanting to re-read something may lead to wanting to read more like something, which in turn leads to what someone referred to as "Piers Anthonyism." (His name seems to crop up a lot in these panels.) Harlequin Romances and their offshoot, Laser Books used this formulaic

approach. The writers' guide for Harlequin, for example, says in which chapter the heroine meets the hero, in which chapter they quarrel and break up, in which chapter they are re-united, and in which chapter they do or don't do whatever actions the line allows. (I've never read a Harlequin romance, but my understanding is that at least up until recently the heroine used to remain not only virginal but un-kissed as well until the final chapter.)

Back in science fiction, though, this phenomenon appears as multiple-book series. Orson Scott Card's *Seventh Son* is good, but it's the first book in a septology. And then we have the shared-world anthologies and the franchise novels...but more on these later.

Panelists liked to read books on new topics. Arthurian legends, for example, may have been mined out by now. Barry Hughart's *Bridge of Birds*, on the other hand, delighted many because it was based in a different background.

Various sub-genres were recommended. All the panelists liked alternate histories, and were often willing to forgive bad writing for interesting concepts (though I would contend that an author who can't be bothered to learn to write well probably won't get the historical aspects right either). Two particular alternate history books mentioned were Steven R. Boyett's *Architect of Sleep* and Harry Turtledove's collection *Agent of Byzantium* (which no one I talked to has actually seen yet). Jim Mann recommended Hal Clement's novels.

The cyberpunk movement (the infamous "C-word") was of course brought up. For those few in the audience who had just returned from the planet Pluto (or is it a planet anymore? I think it got demoted.), cyberpunk was described as science fiction relating to near-future technology and in particular set in a non-white, non-Western future. The panelists found the common thread of illiterate computer jocks unlikely in reality, in spite of its pervasiveness in the literature. The two classics, Vernor Vinge's "True Names" and William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, were given as must-reads for the field. A recent recommended cyberpunk novel was George Alec Effinger's *When Gravity Fails*.

Most people agreed that they didn't force themselves to finish a book they weren't enjoying or, as I said, "Life is too short to read bad books."

Eastern Influences in Fantasy
Saturday, 10 AM
Susan Shwartz, Brenda Clough, Judith Tarr, Brian Thomsen

[This section was written by Mark R. Leeper.]

I arrived about ten minutes late to the "Eastern Influences in Fantasy" panel and not all the participants had name cards. There was somebody who arrived late whose name I did not catch either, but he seemed to be writing an historical novel about the Mongols.

The material covered was far more applicable to writing historical novels than to writing fantasy. Much of this discussion was on what is the best strategy for writing historical fiction. It is quite possible to fall into the trap of getting involved in doing the research and never finishing it or getting the novel written. Either that or the start becomes a thesis in novel form.

Brian Thomsen suggested that a good ratio was two pages of research for every page of novel. I am not sure if he meant two pages read or doing enough research that you could write two pages. A statistic was mentioned that Clavell did fifteen years of research before writing *Shogun*. He also recommended the book *Aztec* by Gary Jennings. One of his favorite ways of researching an historical period is to find someone over 70 who has lived in the area and have the person tell you stories. He says you will get twenty stories of which maybe five will be in research books.

Clough recommends that if you are writing about a country, go there. Writing a story set in Africa you have a distinct advantage over someone writing a story set on Mars. You can buy a ticket and actually go there.

The panel kept returning to the question of whether it is better to do the research and then write the novel or to write the novel, do the research, then correct the novel. The former strategy may lead to never getting the novel written. The latter may lead to a novel you can never get fully accurate, but at least you will have something written down. The claim was made that *In This House of Brede* was written using the write-first-and-research-later strategy. It was countered that Rumor Godden actually knew a fair amount about nuns before she wrote the novel. (All I remember is that it was made into a TV movie with Diana Rigg becoming a nun. The film was made while Rigg was still every boy's heart-throb as Emma Peel. I can remember a friend lamenting what a waste it was for her to become a nun!)

Other random comments: At one point the conversation got around to Alexander the Great. His popularity was very much heightened, it was claimed, by the traveling art exhibit "The Treasures of Alexander." It was suggested that part of the reason is that he is sort of a yuppie ideal. He was young, lived fast, and had a great eye for art collecting.

As a final thought, Susan Schwartz suggested that reading the classic books of the country that is the setting for your story is a good idea. For China, she recommended *Dream of the Red Chamber* and *Pilgrimage to the West* (the novel about the Monkey King, Sun Wu-Kong, who is like China's Mickey Mouse). I would add to her list *Water Margin* and *Romance of Three Kingdoms*. These four works are considered the great timeless classics of China. Schwartz suggested reading for Japan *The Tale of the Genji*. [--Mark R. Leeper]

Arthurian Films
Saturday, 11 AM
Craig Shaw Gardner, Darrell Schweitzer

This panel started off with a list of Arthurian films. Since Mark and I were able to double the size of the list the panel had, I'm not sure how much they did their homework. The final list (for those of you who like lists) was:

- | *Arthur the King* (TV movie with Malcolm McDowell)
- | *Arthur, the Young Warlord*
- | *Camelot* (film version)
- | *Camelot* (HBO version)
- | *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (Bing Crosby version)
- | *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (Richard Basehart version)
- | *The Court Jester* (Danny Kaye--not Arthurian, but of the period)
- | *Excalibur*
- | *The Green Knight*
- | *King Arthur* (Lionheart television)
- | *King Arthur's Daughter*
- | *Knightriders*
- | *Knights of the Round Table*
- | *Lancelot du Lac*
- | "Last Defender of Camelot" (Twilight Zone episode)
- | *Lovespell* (a.k.a. *Tristan and Isolde*)
- | *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*
- | *The Sword in the Stone*
- | *Sword of Lancelot*

It turns out that in checking my sources I discovered that versions of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* were also made in 1921 and 1931 (with Will Rogers) and that it was also remade as *Unidentified Flying Oddball*. No one there could remember the name of *Arthur the King*; that was also from sources later.

The rest of the hour after the listing was done was spent discussing fantasy films in general, rather than Arthurian films in particular. Hollywood's tendency towards whimsy rather than high fantasy was given as the reason for so few true fantasy films. The discussion was pretty much limited to United States films, with even British films being somewhat slighted, though when films dealing with other source material were mentioned, both the Australian *Last Wave* (based on aboriginal legends) and the German films based on Siegfried, the Nibelungenlied, and other Germanic legends were discussed. A fair number of films have been based on Greek mythology, and there are an interminable number which have drawn from the Bible and Christian mythology (particularly if one includes films about saints as well as the traditional Biblical epics). Tolkien has been adapted to film three times, never particularly well.

My feeling is that Hollywood *could* do fantasy well, but wouldn't. That is, they have the ability, but not the will--sort of like the United States space program.

SF Turkeys
Saturday, 2 PM
Mark Keller

This panel, or rather slide presentation, was mobbed which seemed to support Mark (Leeper)'s theory that there is growing trend toward heckling literature the same way people have been heckling films. Certainly there was no dearth of program items which, by design or by accident, spent their time attacking "bad" literature.

Keller said he would limit the talk to written science fiction; however, it was supplemented by a boom box playing musical numbers at full volume. Two pieces he played were Julie Brown's "Earth Girls Are Easy" (soon to be made into a motion picture, if you believe it!) and "Star Trekking." Unfortunately, we chose our seats in the front row before we realized this and I spent a fair proportion of the time with my fingers in my ears. Much of his material was drawn from Neil Gaiman's *Ghastly Beyond Belief*, a collection of examples of "bad" science fiction, fantasy, and horror writing.

His list included an entire spectrum. There were those books and authors that most people agree are bad: Perry Rhodan, There were a couple of romance novels (*Yargo* by Jacqueline Susann and *Restoree* by Anne McCaffrey, which I haven't read and cannot pass judgement on). He showed us copies of the comic book "Reagan's Raiders," in which the Raiders attack the Ayatollah Khomeini and Columbian drug kings and rescue MIAs from Vietnam. He made the usual attacks on Robert Adams, Piers Anthony, Terry Brooks, L. Ron Hubbard, John Jakes, and John Norman. These are being to wear a little thin. Adams's "Horseclans" novels (the primary target of his works) I haven't read. Anthony was attacked for many books, but especially for *Triple Detente*, which Keller claimed was his worst. I think *Race in Time* is worse, and in any case that *Triple Detente* is not all that bad. L. Ron Hubbard is a popular target, but the book of his that I read *Black Genesis* was fairly enjoyable, if overlong. I think I voted it fourth out of six choices for the Hugo last year--it seemed like an attempt to imitate Douglas Adams. Keller attacked Jakes's *Black in Time* at two different panels this convention and on other panels at other conventions. It's getting to be a bit of a stuck needle so far as I'm concerned. And I still contend that the first five "Gor" novels are reasonable action/adventure novels. It just turns out that Norman can make more writing trash than good novels, and given that he probably isn't going to get rich from his job as a professor, he's chosen to "go for the gold," as they say. (Keller says the book he's waiting for is *Free Amazons of Gor*. Mark and Dave are waiting for *Chicken-Plucker of Gor*.)

Carlos Castenada's works were flamed as an attempt to pass off fiction as reality, as was Whitley Streiber's *Communion*. I wonder why he didn't attack the "Illuminati" books as well.

One can argue that many of those are bad. But he also included such Hugo winners as Mark Clifton and Frank Riley's *They'd Rather Be Right* (perhaps not Hugo material, but not actively bad either) and Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game*, which he claimed was bad simply because it was based on the writing cliché of "We thought it was a game, but it turned out to be real after all." (The flip side of this is "We thought it was real, but it turned out to be just a game [or a dream].) Keller seemed to think this was on the same level as the "Adam and Eve" cliché, and perhaps he's right, but it is also true that there is no idea so hackneyed that a good author cannot produce a good work based on it.

Superconductors: The Effect on the Future

Saturday, 3 PM

Mark Olson, Jeff Hecht, Monty Wells

I will not give the entire content of this panel, since it was mostly an overview of all that is going on in the field of superconductors and is well-covered in magazines elsewhere. Olson started out by observing that superconductivity had been discovered in 1911, but it wasn't until recently--very recently--that liquid-nitrogen-temperature superconductors had been discovered/developed. Current superconductors are niobium-tin or niobium-vanadium; the newer ones being investigated are yttrium-barium-copper-oxide with superconductivity at 90 to 95 degrees Kelvin. Samples are still erratic, and many lose their superconductivity after a few trials.

Applications being investigated are power storage (using large loops), Josephson's Junctions (very fast, no-mechanical switches), SQUIDs (Superconductor Quantum Interference Devices which could be used for earthquake detection and in airport detectors), and Nuclear Magnetic Resonance Imaging (which would have many applications in the medical field). And of course there's the Meissner Effect (magnetic repulsion) which is being considered in applications for transportation, though I think we would have to get at least 373 Kelvin superconductors before we started to run trains on it.

Some of the problems before all this science fiction becomes reality are how to work the ceramic materials that are superconductors into ductile wire and how to assure the retention of the superconductivity.

Fantasy by Streetlights

Saturday, 4 PM

Debbie Notkin, Beth Fleisher, Michael Jan Friedman, Esther Friesner, Rick Hautala

This panel dealt with urban fantasy. A brief mention was made at the beginning of a parallel area, urban legends, which has been researched most thoroughly by Jan Harold Brunvand in his books *The Vanishing Hitchhiker* and *The Choking Doberman*.

Some of the books mentioned were Peter David's *Knight Life*, Friesner's *New York by Knight* (never let it be said that authors on panels don't plug their own books!), John Crowley's *Little Big*, R. A. MacAvoy's *Tea with the Black Dragon*, and Mark Helprin's *Winter's Tale*.

The panelists seemed to be looking for books that had a juxtaposition of elements from both fantasy and urban reality; in *Knight Life*, for example, Arthur Pendragon comes back to life and runs for mayor of New York City. Elves living in Central Park, or the "Oh, God" movies would be this sort of thing also. I, however, would distinguish two kinds of urban fantasy: the kind they mention (traditional elements in an urban setting) and the kind where the fantasy is based on the urban setting (such as *A Winter's Tale* or Viido Polikarpus and Tappan King's *Down Town*).

The panelists also recommended Michael De Larrabeiti's "Borribles" books, though a friend of mine says they're terrible ("De gustibus non disputandum"). Piers Anthony's "Incarnations of Immortality" was mentioned, though I don't think actually recommended--the description sounded similar to the "Illuminati" books in that there is a vast conspiracy running the world of which most people are unaware. The television series *Beauty and the Beast* was cited and Emma Bull's *War for the Oaks*, the first of the new Ace Fantasy Specials, was recommended here and in other panels also.

One question that arose was how characters in an urban fantasy should react to, say, a vampire. In Stephen King's novels, his characters know about vampires from books and films. Other authors tend to put their characters more in a vacuum--if women are dying with strange teeth-marks in their necks, no one ever says, "Gee, this seems like a vampire." *Kolchak, the Night-Stalker* got a lot of mileage by having Kolchak recognize the weekly occurrences as supernatural when everyone else pooh-pooed them. At the end of *The Howling*, when a newscaster turns into a wolf on live television, the primary reaction of the audience seems to be, "They can do wonders with special effects these days."

Dinner: Peking Duck House

Dinner was at the Peking Duck House, which has branches in New York's Chinatown and West Side. For a Springfield restaurant it was pretty exotic--they even had jellyfish on the menu! Even more surprising, Kate tried some! We'll probably try the Chinatown one someday. We were smart to go right at 5 PM though; it was almost empty when we arrived, but by the time we were finished (about 6:30 PM) there was a long line to get in.

Changing the Past Saturday, 7 PM

Janet Morris, David Drake, Roger McBride Allen, Chuck Rothman

Revisionism. On the one hand, it's revising our idea of history to fit new facts, like the switch to warm-blooded dinosaurs. On the other hand, it's "rewriting" history to match our philosophical or political perceptions of what history should be, as those who claim the Holocaust never happened are trying to do (which at least one panel member claimed was actually a form of alternate history). In between is the whole spectrum.

According to Morris, the revised version of what killed the dinosaurs (a meteoric collision) has been expanded into the concept of nuclear winter. Of course, all of this grew out of observations by Viking on Mars of Martian dust storms that were so severe as to obscure the sun and cause the temperature to drop. A classic "what was the *true* history?" novel mentioned was Josephine Tey's *Daughter of Time* ("What was the truth about Richard III?").

On the "political rewrite" side, Morris recommended *Life and Death in Shanghai* by Nien Cheng, which describes how during the Cultural Revolution history was being changed almost daily. One audience member mentioned the Lusitania, which led to a long discussion of wartime reporting and how much it could be trusted. During this, I found Morris's patronizing attitude toward members of the audience who didn't have the same perspicacity that she felt she had to be increasingly annoying, and was glad when the topic changed again.

It was Morris's contention that current events affect us more than changes in history. This isn't really surprising, but she spent a lot of time asking the audience if they could name any instances in which historical revelations changed their lives. Most of the revelations were personal in nature, again not surprising. Morris talked about hypnotic regression as a way that people try to investigate the past, and the topic drifted to UFO experiences. The panelists seemed to think that all these stories about UFO kidnapping people and performing all sorts of medical experiments on them were ridiculous--after all, why would a race as advanced as space travelers must be do such things? One wonders first

of all what these people would say when told that tribes of chimpanzees in Africa probably hear the same sorts of stories about humans who kidnap them, take them aboard their vehicles, perform experiments, and then let them go. If the chimpanzees' stories are true, why is it so impossible that the people's stories should also be true? And secondly, it is extremely inconsistent for the panel to talk about how Christian fundamentalists refuse to acknowledge any physical evidence contradicting the Bible (which was considered valid history until recently), and then in the next breath to refuse to acknowledge the evidence of the alleged kidnapped victims. Mind you, I'm not saying that these people were kidnapped by aliens, just that the panel seemed to want to set separate standards for what they personally believed and what they didn't, standards that had no basis in logic.

The panel was, unfortunately, marred by these sorts of hidden philosophical and political agenda, and I suspect I will steer clear of such panels in the future.

Fabulous World of Jules Verne
Saturday, 8:30 PM

The Fabulous World of Jules Verne is based on the spirit of Verne's work rather than the letter. It is not a rendition of any particular novel or set of characters, but it *feels* like it is. Made in 1958 in Czechoslovakia, it combines live-action with paper and wood cut-out animation, all filmed in a sepia tone with the graininess of old-time illustrations that gives the film a charmingly Victorian feel. Parts of it are inaccurate (particularly the underwater motion sequences, which are very unrealistic, and the idea that one changes the picture from a projector by changing the shutter), but this can be forgiven. Parts of it are almost surrealistic, with roller-skating camels and a wonderful sequence in which animated fish segue into animated butterflies in a manner not unlike an Escher drawing. The director, Karel Zeman, went on to make *The Fabulous Baron Munchausen* in 1961.

The Fabulous World of Jules Verne was followed by a short, "Ballet Robotique," which consisted of four sequences of robots working in factories set to music (sort of like *Candid Camera* used to do traffic policemen). The section "Pas de Deux" was done to the "Blue Danube" waltz, which is a bit overused in science fiction. The segment "Finale" was done on an automobile assembly line to the *1812 Overture* and had sparks flying during the cannon shots--pretty clever.

It is worth noting that in keeping with the new, more sedate Boskone, there was no heckling!

Kirk Poland Memorial Bad Prose Competition
Saturday, 10 PM
Craig Shaw Gardner, Geary Gravel, Ellen Kushner, Darrell Schweitzer, Eric Van

This was a repeat of a popular item at Readercon last year. Kirk Poland is the hack author in some science fiction novel whose name and author escape me at the moment. The competition worked like this: a section of bad prose from a published science fiction novel was read to the audience, ending in mid-sentence. Then five possible endings were read--one from each of the contestants (Craig Shaw Gardner, Geary Gravel, Ellen Kushner, and Darrell Schweitzer) and the *real* ending. The audience then voted on which they thought was the real ending. Each author got a point for each member of the audience s/he fooled; the audience got a point for each vote for the correct ending. The authors "honored" in this competition included Leo Brett (a.k.a. R. L. Fanthorpe) (*Faceless Planet*), Philip K. Dick (*The Zap Gun*), Alan Dean Foster (*Bloodhype*), L. Ron Hubbard ("Fear"), Robert Silverberg (*Revolt on Alpha C*), E. E. Smith (*Triplanetary*), A. E. Van Vogt (*Players of Null-A*), and Lin Carter (*Thongor of Lemuria*).

Geary Gravel, the defending champion, again won handily. At Readercon they had ten selections; here they had eight, and it took about two hours. Perhaps a further cut is needed. But there's the whole question of the philosophy of this panel. As Mark pointed out, a few years ago Boskone started

showing a midnight "turkey film" for heckling purposes. People liked it so much they started heckling all the films. Now they're starting a "turkey science fiction" item (actually more than one). And a lot of what is being called a "turkey" isn't (see my comments on *Ender's Game* et al in the section on the "SF Turkeys" presentation). I think that there is enough good science fiction that doesn't get recognized that the panels should work on that rather than having everyone laugh at bad science fiction, not to mention how the authors who are singled out for this "honor" must feel. If they must have a "bad writing" competition, I think it would come off as less vicious if they chose selections from authors generally lauded in the field (as with the Silverberg and Dick entries this year). To attack an author's entire *oeuvre*, as the organizers of this competition have done with A. E. Van Vogt, L. Ron Hubbard, and especially Lin Carter, is offensive and in extremely poor taste. "The catch phrase this convention was "...wall of stinking jelly. One swung \\'his axe, slicing through the fatty flesh oozing colorless ichor."

Readercon Party Saturday, 11 PM

The Readercon committee was much in evidence throughout Boskone--no doubt because they all wore their bright red Readercon T-shirts. Many of the items seemed to have been organized by them, which some people felt was an attempt on their part to "take over" Boskone, but I would interpret as people volunteering to work on program items they were particularly interested in. The Kirk Poland Competition was, of course, a direct steal from Readercon, but it shouldn't surprise anyone that people who run a convention dedicated to books will be on panels entitled "How to Read Better" and "I Just Read the Stuff!" Had they not been wearing the T-shirts, people wouldn't have even noticed. But that's an old NESFA tradition--before every Worldcon, NESFA issues a suggested schedule to its members of which T-shirt should be worn on which day.

By the way, Readercon has had a change of date and a change of venue and will be held at the Lowell Hilton November 18-20, 1988. The Guest of Honor remains Samuel R. Delany.

Turn of the Century Illustration Sunday, 11 AM Paul Chadwick

[This section was written by Mark R. Leeper.]

I have a lot of nerve trying to describe a slide show of art without being able to illustrate any of it, but here goes. Paul Chadwick, I take it from some of his own art he mixed in, is a comic book artist with a fascination for the history of illustration. The art he showed was made up of the art of the Robinson family which included among others W. Heath Robinson (1872-1944) and Charles Robinson, and the art of Kay Nielsen. The slide show opened with W. Heath Robinson's illustrations for a book-length poem "The Song of England" about the far-flung reaches that Englishmen had gone to to spread the civilization. Now what was interesting is the illustrations showed the bones of dead Englishmen all over the world beckoning the living to pick up where they left off. These dead are out there, don't let their death be in vain. How different from the current feeling to avoid space like the old neighborhood haunted house because seven people died there in one day.

Robinson's style tends toward the mystical with campfire smoke forming into women's heads beckoning the intrepid explorers on. There were pieces for the *Verses of Rudyard Kipling* and *Service Songs of South Africa* (also by Kipling), and some great illustrations for *Midsummer Night's Dream* showing the characters floating in space. Charles Robinson's art did not have quite the same quality but it had more of a feel of reality, even for stories like "The Frog Prince." One piece by Thomas Robinson looked much like the kind of art one finds in Lang's multi-colored "Fairy Books."

Kay Nielsen I had always thought of as a light fantasist, but many of the illustrations Chadwick chose had a bored and decadent look one associates with Aubrey Beardsley. Others showed exaggerated features, like very long noses, that were later imitated by Brian Froud. Nielsen did the inspirational work for *Fantasia*. He did a series of sketches that Disney Studios then used to inspire their artists. Several of the illustrations were from *East o' the Sun, West o' the Moon*. [--Mark R. Leeper]

The Future Went Wrong
Sunday, 12 noon
Hal Clement, Bob Eggleton, Julius Schwartz, Darrell Schweitzer

You can tell Clement is a teacher--this panel was a lot more structured than most of the others. After defining what a prediction was (it had to be specific as to exactly what it was predicting and when; something interpreted after the fact as a prediction, like much of Nostradamus, wouldn't count), the panelists listed a few popular predictions gone wrong: backyard rockets, lost races on the far side of the moon, new elements, new wavelengths (David Lindsay's new colors in *A Voyage to Arcturus* might be an example of this), personal helicopters. Even those who predicted scientific developments got the details off; no predictions of the first human landing on the moon included millions watching it live on television. And what everyone failed to predict were social changes: the civil rights movement, the women's movement, and now the gay rights movement. Stories written in the Forties have the social sensibilities of the Forties and so on. I recently saw parts of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?* and was struck by how ridiculous it all looked now, twenty years later. (But then, I thought it was ridiculous even at the time.) Science fiction suffers from the same myopia; what seems like a revolutionary social idea now will undoubtedly be totally ridiculous in twenty years.

Two novels of prediction that were specifically discussed were George Orwell's *1984* and Philip Wylie's *The End of the Dream*. The former has not come to pass, and even when it was written it was a bit of an alternate history, since seemingly World War II never occurred. The latter may yet come true--parts of it reflect a very real environmental trend--but we can't tell at this point.

And in all the robotics stories, no one ever predicted what is coming to pass: that in Japan the workers are agitating to have the robots join the unions so that the workers won't be at a disadvantage because of their necessity for food and sleep.

How to Read Better
Sunday, 2 PM
David G. Hartwell, Patrick Nielsen Hayden, Teresa Nielsen Hayden, Eric Van

In describing how to read better, the panel started by explaining that science fiction is different from other fiction in that it is literal rather than metaphorical (though mystery fiction may share this distinction also). This means that when a mainstream reader picks up a science fiction novel, s/he may well start by asking, "What do these aliens represent?" when that question is meaningless--they represent aliens. On the other hand, a science fiction reader may get into trouble trying to take a mainstream novel literally when it is really an allegory. Science fiction also has more emphasis on short fiction (short story, novelette, and novella--the latter category being almost entirely moribund except in science fiction). This established, the first advice on how to read better was to read more--to read other genres and other types of writing and think about the differences. The example given was how the reader should interpret the sentence "Her world exploded." Obviously if this sentence is encountered in a romance novel it has a different meaning than if it is encountered in a science fiction novel (though see the comments on *Restore* and *Yargo* above).

One thing science fiction readers have to train themselves to do is to read slower. In general, let the style dictate the speed; poetry is the form that probably should be read the slowest. Read aloud. Get used to hearing how things sound. I found this almost the only way to read *The Color Purple*--not

actually reading it aloud, but hearing it in my head. It's hard to explain, but you probably know what I mean. One of the panelists claimed this was the only way he could make sense of Chaucer. Listening to authors' readings is a variation on this.

Re-read what you have read; often more will be discovered on the second reading--particularly if it has taken you a while to get in synch with the book during the first reading. I found myself reading Ford's *Dragon Waiting* with some misapprehensions; a re-reading cleared them up.

The hardest topic to read, and hence one of the best for practicing your reading skills, is philosophy. One panelist described it as being like running with weights on your ankles.

Various works on reading and writing were cited, among them:

- | *Origin and Development of the English Language*
- | *How Does a Poem Mean?* (John Ciardi)
- | *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Terry Eagleton)
- | *Aspects of the Novel* (E. M. Forster)
- | *The ABC of Reading* (Ezra Pound) .LE

Specific to science fiction, the following are highly recommended: .DL

- | *The Issue at Hand and More Issues at Hand* (James Blish, writing as William Atheling)
- | *The Tale That Wags the Dog* (James Blish)
- | *Starboard Wine* (Samuel Delany)
- | *In Search of Wonder* (Damon Knight)
- | *Worlds of Wonder* (Robert Silverberg)
- | *Those Who Can* (Robin Scott Wilson) .LE

Things You Should Have Read

Sunday, 3 PM

Moshe Feder, Ginger Buchanan, Greg Cox, Debbie Notkin

This was yet another list panel; however, some trends were discussed before the listing got under way. Notkin observed that, to no one's surprise, books are getting more expensive. Everyone commented on the trend toward shared worlds and franchised titles ("Joe Unknown writing in the Robot Universe of Isaac Asimov"--though the authors in the current Robot City series are not unknown). Someone did that at least some of the shared world series are winding down. Of the new trend toward franchising, someone said, "Did you ever think you'd look back to the shared world books with nostalgia?" There are a lot of books trying to look like William Gibson.

Then the panelists got to listing books. I will provide the list (with comments where applicable, and in no particular order): .DL

- | *Replay* (Ken Grimwood), recommended by both Buchanan and Cox. It was marketed in hardcover as mainstream but deals with alternate histories and time travel. I think it's being marketed as a mystery novel in paperback--it's listed in Waldenbooks "Crime Times."
- | *A Mask for the General* (Lisa Goldstein), recommended by Notkin. Post-holocaust.
- | *Chernobyl* (Frederik Pohl), recommended by Buchanan.
- | *War for the Oaks* (Emma Bull), recommended by Notkin. She's really pushing this book.
- | *The Fallen Woman* (Pat Murphy), recommended by Buchanan. The main character is a woman who can sense where archaeologists should dig for finds.
- | *The Sun, the Moon, and the Stars* (Steven Brust)
- | *On Stranger Tides* (Tim Powers)

- | *Swordspoint* (Ellen Kushner)
- | *Land of Dreams* (Jim Blaylock)
- | *Strange Toys* and *Living in Ether* (Patricia Geary), recommended by Notkin, though Kate Pott says they're not that good.
- | *Voice of Our Shadow*, *Bones of the Moon*, and *Land of Laughs* (Jonathan Carroll)
- | *Soldier of the Mist* (Gene Wolfe)
- | *When Gravity Fails* (George Alec Effinger), an intentionally cyberpunk novel.
- | *Vacuum Flowers* (Michael Swanwick), a novel that everyone treats as cyberpunk that isn't.
- | *Perfume* (Patrick Susskind), a horror novel about someone with no sense of smell who uses odors as a means of disguise.
- | *Ash Wednesday* (Chet Williamson)
- | *Forge of God* (Greg Bear)
- | *Marble Street* and *Replicant* (Richard Bowker)
- | *Misery* (Stephen King)
- | *Tool of the Trade* (Joe Haldeman)
- | *How Much for Just the Planet?* (John M. Ford), a "Star Trek" novel not just for Trekkies.
- | *Mind Players* (Pat Cadigan)
- | *Journal of Nicholas the American* (Leigh Kennedy)
- | "The Evening, the Morning, and the Night" (Octavia Butler)
- | "Why I Left Joe's All-Night Hamburgers" (Lawrence Watt-Evans)
- | *Soldiers of Paradise* (Paul Parks)
- | short works of Neil Barrett appearing in *Asimov's*
- | *In the Fields of Fire* (edited by Jack Dann), a collection of stories about the Vietnam War.

One unusual item mentioned was *Watchmen*, a graphic novel of an alternate history a la *Wild Cards*.

The Way We Were...
Sunday, 4 PM
Jim Mann, Laurie Mann

This was the traditional gripe session. The major complaints seemed to center around the cutbacks that Boskone had had in the areas of film programming and costuming. NESFA explained that they had in some regards (costuming and the age limit policy) perhaps overreacted. But they couldn't afford to take the chance. Next year's policies will probably reflect the consensus that the geographical change has weeded out the worst of the problem.

My major gripe about the gripe session was that some of the people who were presenting gripes seemed to have come directly from Bob & Ray's "Slow Talkers of America." Though people were supposedly limited to two or three minutes each, some took longer than that to just express what their gripe was. In addition, there was one person who seemed to think this was the time to do street theater about how "we were not numbers, we were free men" (a la *The Prisoner* intro--I wonder what he thought *I* was!) and so on. Amusing though it was, this was not the right place for it, when other people were waiting to speak. His excuse was that no one on the committee ever listened to the gripes anyway, a claim patently false, since many of this year's changes came out of last year's gripe session.

Miscellaneous

Attendance was somewhere between 1300 and 1500, making this the smallest Boskone since 1981. There was an area in the Marriott with the information table, message board, party board, freebie tables, etc. The boards were much neater and more readable than in previous years, as was the freebie table. The flyers didn't overflow onto the floor or get all shuffled together, making it easier to see what was there. There were also tables for organizations--Noreascon 3 (NESFA had a table in the hucksters' room as well), Orlando in '92, DC in '92, and the Gaylaxians, a Massachusetts group whose

motto is "Out of the closet and into the universe!" (In case anyone is interested, their address is P. O. Box 1051, Back Bay Annex, Boston MA 02117.) No other clubs had tables.

Summary

As I said at the gripe session, there were problems. I would have liked a better film program, and there were people with attitude problems on both sides (attendees and staff). There were some technical difficulties with having two hotels, and not everything was perfect. But it was *so* much better than Boskone 24 than I can't begin to describe it. You could talk to people. You could get a cup of coffee, sit down, and read if you wanted to. No one was waving swords at you, breaking elevators, or destroying the hotels. One attendee (see the gripe session above) was loudly berating NESFA for running a terrible convention. When I said the real test was how many came back next year, he agreed. He seemed to think no one would. I think he's wrong, and I explain some of my reasons in the gripe session section above. Everyone I came with signed up already for Boskone 26 (January 27-29, 1989; Guest of Honor Tim Powers), and I think will be even better.

Evelyn C. Leeper may be reached via [e-mail](#) or you may visit her [Homepage](#).

[Return to Index](#)

[Other Conventions](#)

[FANAC Homepage](#)