Boskone 30
A convention report by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Well, the drive was an hour longer going up this year, due to the move from Springfield to Framingham, and three hours longer coming back, because there was a snowstorm added on as well. Still, having everything in one hotel *was* nice.

Two years ago, panelists registered in the regular registration area and were given their panelist information there. Last year we had to go to the Green Room to get our panelist information, and this was in the other hotel, so this was a trifle inconvenient. This year they returned to handing out the panelist information at the regular registration desk.

Hotel

The Sheraton Tara was quite nice, and having everything in one hotel a definite plus! There were a couple of panels with people standing in back, but on the whole crowding was not a problem. The move to Framingham does not seem to have changed the size of Boskone any; it has been holding steady at 900 or so for the past three years. The parties seemed fairly empty, except for the party with the belly-dancer.

Dealers Room

Since there was only one hotel, there was only one dealers room, but this had what might be called a "back room" with some of the dealers, and this back room was possibly less trafficked in than the main room. There were about the same number of dealers as previous years, with books

predominating. I didn't see any Japanese videos, but the rest of the assortment was similar to last year's as well. As usual, I found a half-dozen books I couldn't find anywhere else (though I hadn't checked the Science Fiction Shop in New York yet), and a couple more I picked up on impulse. There was a Border's Bookstore nearby, but car problems, lack of time, and the feeling that there were superstores near us at home kept us from getting there (although I believe Willis and Yolen had an autograph session there Friday afternoon).

Art Show

For the first time at a Boskone, I didn't get to the Art Show. Okay, that's not *exactly* true: I did stick my head through the door at one point to see how Mark's origami panel was going. It was packed and I left. But I never got a chance to look at the art itself. I think it's because I have been increasingly disappointed at the contents and so never made the time. Then again, attending every Connie Willis panel kept me pretty busy!

Programming

There were a few science panels, none of which I got to. I guess the era of the "hard-science" Boskone is over. Most of the science panels were computer-oriented. I think the overall number of panels may be decreasing as well. This is due to the lower attendance at Boskone--fewer attendees mean fewer panel participants, as well as fewer people in the audience. (Though Joe Haldeman was the Guest of Honor, I never got to a panel of his. I mention this because from the number of Connie Willis panels I attended, you might think *she* was the Guest of Honor. Actually, she came to Boskone because it was on the way to Chicago, where she was traveling for a Monday conference. How is Boston on the way from Colorado to Chicago? Well, my guess is that by flying round-trip to Boston with a stop-over in Chicago on the way back, Willis could then have a Saturday night stay, which for some reason makes airline tickets a *lot* cheaper, enough cheaper in fact probably to cover the cost of the hotel room for Boskone. Anyway, I was quite pleased about this turn of events.)

The First Night

The Friday night Meet-the-VIPs party was held in the same room as the film, and adjacent to the con suite. This allowed the Shirim Klezmer Orchestra to set up their equipment only once instead of having to move it from the party to the film room as they did last year. At the party I was approached by someone who asked if I would mind signing some autographs. It turns out he thought I was Connie Willis (shades of MagiCon!). Connie Willis is several inches taller than I am, and her hair is red rather than dark brown, but I guess from a black-and-white photo on a book jacket, we look alike. Why doesn't anyone claim I *write* like Connie Willis?

The con suite offered free munchies as well as free soft drinks this year (last year the drinks were free, but the chips and such were not).

I couldn't spend all my time at the party, because Mark had a film panel at 9 PM.

SF Movies and TV: The Year in Review
Friday, 9 PM
Daniel Kimmel (mod), Saul Jaffe, Mark R. Leeper, Jim Mann

I got to the panel late, but didn't seem to have missed much. Kimmel was "moderating" the panel by listing every science fiction, fantasy, and horror film he could think of that was released in 1992, and

only at the end of the list asking for additions or additional comments. Even with his long list (he works for *Variety*), he omitted *Grand Tour: Disaster in Time* (based on C. L. Moore's "Vintage Season"), *Kafka*, *Runestone*, *Shadows and Fog*, and *Zentropa* (known in Europe as *Europa*). Mann noted the availability of *Godzilla vs. Biollante* on videotape; I noted the videotape release of the 1931 Spanish-language *Dracula* after many years of total unavailability (the only complete print was in a vault in Havana).

Kimmel then had Jaffe list all the television released in 1992. Since Jaffe is working on a book about science fiction television, he had a very complete list, but I think most people started tuning out during the long list of Saturday morning cartoon shows. Mann recommended "The Inner Light" as the best of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*; I recommended American Playhouse's "Fool's Fire" (based on Edgar Allan Poe's "Hopfrog").

Nosferatu
Friday, 10 PM

The only part of the film program I got to was *Nosferatu*. I think *Robot Jox* was also shown on film; there was a video program as well. *Nosferatu* was shown with live accompaniment by the Shirim Klezmer Orchestra. They had solved the problems of set-up and reel changes that plagued last year's film, but the music didn't always suit the movie. Mark and I particularly agreed that a klezmer-disco version of "Summertime" from *Porgy and Bess* was probably not what Murnau had in mind when he made the film.

Parties

I dropped by the "Boston in 1998" party to find out what was going on. The Sheraton Boston had signed a contract with the American Political Science Association for Labor Day weekend, 1998, but the Hynes Convention Center was still interested in having Noreascon. The issue seems to be whether enough hotel rooms in the immediate area can be found to sustain the convention. My feeling was that the committee members thought there could be, and that the bid would proceed without the Sheraton. Bidding against Boston are Baltimore and Niagara Falls. I went to the Baltimore party Saturday night and was heartily *unimpressed*. Based on the people there I spoke to, a Baltimore convention shows every sign that it would be just as poorly run as the last Baltimore convention. I could be wrong, but unless they concentrate more on the content and less on offering rum drinks, they will not be getting my vote.

Saturday Morning

We were going to go out for breakfast, but our car wouldn't start. The battery cranked, but the engine just wouldn't catch. Eventually we gave up and ate in the hotel dining room. We figured we could go out for dinner, since friends would be arriving with another car, but it turned out that they were afraid to give up their parking space. (There were more parking spaces behind the hotel, but this was not obvious.)

History in SF
Saturday, 11 AM
Michael F. Flynn, Mark Keller, Connie Willis

The panelists started by saying they would be talking about setting stories in the past or using the past in science fiction. Alternate histories were of course mentioned but on the whole the panelists

dealt with other uses of history in science fiction. (Keller did point out the alternate histories have a firm academic background, at least in economics, where "counter-factuals" are a standard tool.)

One popular use of history is to provide a ready-made background for a future or alien society, or as Mark Keller described it, "Look it up instead of make it up." The Turkish Ottoman Empire, for example, was the basis of the society in Frank Herbert's *Dune* (and subsequent books). This has the advantage of being realistic and consistent (at least as much as history itself ever is), but can also be a bit obvious and strained to the reader.

Another approach is to break some historical law. For example, stories with faster-than-light travel break a physical law. Larry Niven's *Protector* breaks a biological law. Stories can also break historical laws, although clearly there is far more disagreement on what constitutes a historical law. One person gave as an example that a story could break "Marxist law"; Keller suggested that L. Neil Smith's alternate histories assume a universe in which libertarianism works. This latter sounded more like a desire to stir up controversy than anything else, since Flynn has won the Prometheus Award from the Libertarians two years in a row. But Flynn did not rise to the bait (offered twice in the hour). The question of exactly what constitutes a historical law brought up the book *Cycles, the Science of Prediction* by Edward R. Dewey and Edwin F. Dakin, which in 1947 predicted the economic cycles that we seem to be living through: a big recession in the early 1980s, another smaller one in the early 1990s, an upturn in January 1993, and a big upturn in 2006. (This is supposedly still in print from the Foundation for the Study of Cycles, 1964, 255pp, $15.)

Willis suggested the only thing we can do to predict the future was to try to "extrapolate the future from the past." Her upcoming novella for Bantam, "Uncharted Territory," does that in its story of a meeting between an advanced culture and a primitive one. (I will say more about that below when I talk about the reading.)

This led to some comments on "PC" ("political correctness") which Willis says is trying to correct the mistakes of the past without taking into account Murphy's Law. Murphy's Law figures into this in two ways: first, many of the mistakes were the result of Murphy's Law, and second, all our attempts to correct things will also be plagued by Murphy's Law.

Willis also pointed out that coincidence happens in history. (Stephen Jay Gould's whole theory of evolutionary biology is built up from contingencies.) Alternate histories try to avoid coincidence because that technique has fallen into disrepute, but the fact remains that truth is stranger than fiction. A reasonable middle road to take is to use coincidence in your set-up but not in your resolution. Any coincidence later in your story needs to have been set up ahead of time. (For example, the coincidental meeting of two friends can trigger old feelings that set the plot into motion, but the hero better not be saved from the gallows by the last-minute appearance of a here-to-fore unmentioned twin brother.)

Keller described Fernand Braudel's "Theory of History," in which there are three modes: long stretch, oscillating or fluctuating, and progressive. (These will sound familiar to anyone who has read Maureen F. McHugh's *China Mountain Zhang*.) Braudel was an economic historian, and looked primarily at economic trends. All economical/historical trends theoretically fit into one of these modes. For example, "standard of living" is generally considered to be progressive, while "skirt lengths" is oscillating. Long stretch, I assume, is a reference to historical inertia--it takes a long time to effect substantial changes.

As usual, Josephine Tey's *Daughter of Time* (Macmillen, 1988, $4.95) was mentioned as a good book demonstrating how to research history. Panelists agreed that it was necessary to read primary sources, not just what historians say about them, and this was connected to the "tempocentrism" Willis felt was evidenced by many historians.

Using history in one's stories is not without its pitfalls, however. Willis related that at a discussion of her novel *Lincoln's Dreams* one of the attendees asked how much of the Civil War material Willis had made up (none of it, it turns out). When pressed, the attendee said, "Well, for example, who's this Grant character?" The panelists (and the audience) agreed, I think, that one must operate within the (ever-shrinking) realm of popular knowledge, but there is still much disagreement on the boundaries of that realm. One audience member, for example, seemed shocked that a reader of Dan Simmons's *Hyperion* didn't recognize the name of a saint mentioned in passing early on as actually being the cleric who was involved in the Piltdown Hoax and who set forth a theological explanation of evolution involving multiple, parallel lineages, all moving towards a state of more spirit and less matter. (This is Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, whose evolutionary theories are put forward to *The Phenomenon of Man* [Harper Collins, 1975, $12], and who is discussed at great length in Stephen Jay Gould's *Hen's Teeth and Horse's Toes* [Norton, 1983, 413pp, $6.95].) In a society in which people don't recognize the name of Grant in connection with the Civil War, this seems an overly optimistic expectation of your readership's knowledge.

Someone in the audience said he was writing an alternate history in which a woman was elected president sometime earlier this century by 95% of the voters, the Electoral College having been dissolved. This led panelists to point out that the key to a believable alternate history is having only one change, and dumping the Electoral College *and* electing a woman was one change too many. Also noted was that 95% of the voters never agree on *anything* and if the writer wanted to indicate a landslide, he should look at old election results to get some idea of what constitutes a landslide.

Willis said the biggest problem with using history in science fiction is that many people have what she called "tempocentrism" (or "now-ism"). Historians are *not* unbiased. In her research for *Doomsday Book* she found many historians who talked about how the reason the plague killed so many was that the people of that time were dirty, ignorant, etc. But Willis notes that even today, if diagnosed and treated with the best our medical science has to offer, the plague has a 50% mortality rate. She also objected to the characterization of people of the 14th Century as being unfeeling and unaffected by deaths the way we are, because they were used to it. Willis quoted a man from Vienna in 1347 who wrote, "This day have I buried my wife and five children in one grave. No tears. It is the end of the world." Historians also say things like, "The plague was of a purgative rather than a disastrous nature," which indicates (to me, anyway) that they are being just as callous as they accuse the 14th Century people as being. (She talks about this at greater length in her interview in the July 1992 issue of *Locus*.)

This led to a brief discussions of plagues and diseases in history. Rene Dubos's *The Mirage of Health: Utopias, Progress, & Biological Change* (Rutgers University Press, 1987, 236pp, $13) was cited as a source which discussed the deaths in the Western Hemisphere from disease during the first half of the 16th Century. In 1520, there were estimated to be 25,000,000 people in Mexico; a generation later there were only 2,500,000. The Spaniards did not *intend* to kill 90% of the population; this happened because of diseases they unwittingly carried (and to which they were, on the whole, immune). One audience member seemed to want to hold on to the idea that the Europeans did this deliberately and suggested that they put the smallpox carriers on the ships to send the disease over them, but as someone else pointed out, "You do *not* want disease carriers on the same ship as you!" (Diseases worked against the Europeans in some places as well. There is a Gambian stamp honoring the mosquito as being the primary reason that Europeans were unable to colonize that country for so many years.)

Successful diseases adapt to keep the host alive longer, so that they can live longer. "That's why AIDS is such a wonderful disease," said Willis, though quickly clarifying that she meant in terms of its survival characteristics rather than a good thing for humans. One thing I noticed at this panel is that *everyone* seems to mis-use the word "decimate": it means to kill off one-tenth, *not* to leave only a tenth.

In summary, the message seemed to me that people in the past weren't that different from us (said Keller), but they were not like us (added Willis). Someone mentioned *The Big Sky* by Alfred B. Guthrie, Jr. (Bantam, 1984, $4.95), which captures the mind-set of a 19th Century trapper, but makes him so alien the modern reader can't relate to him. Willis says that the problem is that "we live in a self-centered age" and think that our beliefs are of necessity more correct than those of the past. She talked about the recent attempts to change church language into something more inclusive of women, and cited a change to a hymn by St. Francis which eventually drove her to leave the choir because, as she put it, "To set ourselves above St. Francis is a great act of hubris and foolishness." Willis in general decried the current trend toward politically correctness which seems to treat everyone from the past as villains because they didn't agree with us. As Keller said, we may disagree with them, but "they were sincere" (i.e., they didn't do what they did to be evil, but because they believed it was right).

Short Science Fiction: The Cutting Edge
Saturday, noon
Sheila Williams (mod), James Patrick Kelly, Steven Popkes, Darrell Schweitzer, Connie Willis

People as usual promoted their latest books. Willis said the new collection of her short fiction, *Impossible Things*, would be coming out in December, at which time *Fire Watch* would also be re-issued. (This, by the way, explains why someone thought Willis had a collection called *Artificial Things*, which is actually a Karen Joy Fowler collection which had originally been titled *The Lake Is Full of Artificial Things*.)

Regarding the "cutting edge," someone quoted George Bernard Shaw as saying, "Everything changes but the avant garde." While the panelists talked mostly about the "cutting edge" of science fiction in terms of cyberpunk et al, I thought the title of the panel mean that short fiction *was* the cutting edge of science fiction. (I certainly find it easier to find Hugo nominees among the short stories than among the novels; in fact, it seems the longer the stories get, the harder it is to find Hugo nominees.) Williams seemed to think that rather than being the cutting edge, most of what she gets for *Asimov's Science Fiction* is the "cutting sponge," by which I assume she means it just soaks up whatever ideas are hanging around. Kelly thought the whole idea of the cutting edge was somewhat anti-artistic in that once a cutting edge has been declared, it silences dissent.

Going back to older ideas of the avant garde, the "New Wave," and the cutting edge, Schweitzer said that Barry Malzberg felt that the golden age of science fiction was from 1948-1955 because that was when ground-breaking work was done. On the whole, though, the panelists agreed that trends and movements were dangerous and counter-productive, not only because they silence dissent, but because they lead to too much "copy-cat-ism." As one panelist said, "Unique voices don't fit into a history of science fiction." (This person had been talking to an academic who was teaching a course on the history of science fiction and mentioned that R. A. Lafferty [I believe] was not included. The response was that Lafferty didn't start any trends and influenced no specific authors in any noticeable fashion, so he was irrelevant to the course.)

Secular humanism was described by Willis as "decaying decorations on an already moldy wedding cake of literature." (I'm not sure what that means, but it sounds great.) Most of science fiction seems to be in the direction of "minor works by junior authors," franchise works, and general land-fill material. Where are the great "patterning works" the panel mentioned: H. Rider Haggard's *She*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*? (My guess is they're scheduled for next year's Boskone's "Neglected Authors" track--after all, two years ago they did Jules Verne.)

Luckily, there is hope. Magazines are forced to buy fiction from new writers to survive, so there is a chance to see new, fresh fiction. This is why short fiction is the cutting edge, I guess. (I might claim the golden age of short stories is now, in fact.) What they are seeing could be described as the "Third

Wave" of cyberpunk. The First Wave was William Gibson's *Neuromancer*. The Second Wave was all the rip-offs that came out of that. The Third Wave are the works which deal with the use of real-world technology from authors like Greg Egan, Alex Jablokov, Jonathan Lethem, and Vernor Vinge. Schweitzer pointed out in this context that John Varley's *Steel Beach*, for example, is full of matter-of-fact sex, technology, and genetic engineering that would have made the book revolutionary in 1968. (The sex alone would have gotten it bounced by a number of publishers.) Now, it's considered "straightforward" science fiction--nothing ground-breaking. And the "ground-breaking" works of the 1960s were all copies of literary ground-breakers that had gone before: John Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar* was the child of John dos Passos's work; Brian W. Aldiss's *Barefoot in the Head* was heavily influenced by James Joyce. Still, Williams emphasized that "the best authors have their own voice." While any author will be influenced by other literature, good authors try to set trends rather than follow them, try to write their own works instead of copying others. Willis agreed, saying that this was what kept the science fiction field fresh while other genres stagnate: "Romances imploded into a neutron star; science fiction is like a blob that keeps growing." (Someone noted that the fastest growing sub-genre in romances is the time-travel romance.)

Willis also observed that the new voice is what can revive an ailing field. "An author like a Stephen King can come along and rejuvenate a dead and decaying [!] field."

Brief mention was made of short fiction for children. Most markets for this are very unreasonable regarding republication rights (according to Schweitzer, who thought only *Cricket* was a worthwhile market to sell short children's fiction to). Because of the limited number of outlets, few authors find it worthwhile to write a children's story that they can send to only one or two publications, and have no chance of resale income.

Asked what were the problem areas in science fiction today, Schweitzer said he was tired of the proliferation of "elfy-welfy" fantasy. Willis attacked "horrible, ghastly 82-volume trilogies." There is no dearth of stories per se, but often it seems that the bad drives out the good. Schweitzer closed by saying that "90% of today's science fiction wouldn't have been published in 1940." (Of course, a lot of it couldn't have been written then either.)

SF Origami
Saturday, 1 PM
Mark R. Leeper

I didn't attend this, but I did look in and see that there were about twenty people folding origami. In fact, Mark got asked to come to the con suite Saturday night and teach some more, and ended up spending another couple of hours there.

Responsibility and the Arts
Saturday, 2 PM
Ellen Asher, A. J. Austin, Michael F. Flynn, Charles Ryan, Jane Yolen

The issues posed to the panelists beforehand to be thinking about dealt in part with the question of whether the panelists censor themselves. Austin's response was, "Self-censorship? My mom reads my stuff!" Asher said the real problem seemed to be that the trend was to call any form of selection censorship. (Certainly the recent discussion of John Norman on Usenet seems to fall into this category.) The panelists never completely agreed on a definition of "censorship" but seemed to agree that it included physical sanctions of some sort. As long as someone was free to publish his or her own works and sell them, then censorship per se was not being exercised. One can certainly argue this--an entire hour could be spent without ever deciding whether the refusal of two or three major book distributors to carry some work constituted some form of *ipso facto* censorship, for example.

Yolen said the problem in trying to arrive at such a definition was that some people are defining censorship in terms of commerce and some are defining it in terms of art. (Is the NEA's refusal to fund certain artists censorship?)

Another issue these days is the credentials of the author. This is not merely the question of their technical knowledge of whatever they are writing about, but whether, for example, a biography of Malcolm X is as valid when written by a white author as by a black author. The best-known example of this was *The Education of Little Tree*, a book about Native Americans widely praised until it was discovered that Forrest Carter, the "Native American" who wrote it, was actually a white racist (some say a former racist). Does a people have the exclusive rights to their story? Yolen said she would not want to see a situation where only Jews could write about Jews, only blacks could write about blacks, and so on, in part because if that is the case, then you can never have a book that includes people from many groups. What people seem to forget, Yolen said, was that writers *create*. That's what writing is about. Writers are *supposed* to be able to write characters other than themselves. Shakespeare may or may not have been Francis Bacon, but he was not a Jew *and* a Moor *and* a teenage girl *and* a Danish prince *and* an aging king .... This gets into the whole question of cross-racial casting in films. Could a white man successfully play Martin Luther King? (Yes, Olivier played Othello, but does that apply?) Could Whoopi Goldberg play Juliet?

Ryan pointed out that the artist is supposed to challenge society, and that it is impossible to do so without offending someone. The whole issue of political correctness often seems to center around a distrust of imagination. (In fairness, it seems to me that if "political correctness" is the left-wing of the spectrum, then the right-wing also distrusts imagination and wants to control strictly what children can see and read.) A well-known literary example of challenging society was Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, and panelists pointed out that similar problems occur even today when newspapers discover facts about toxic waste that governments want to conceal.

The panelists left themselves and the audience pondering the question of what the difference between self-censorship and moral cowardice was. For example, bookstores that carried Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* were threatened. In some cases, the stores would have the employees decide for themselves whether to carry the book. If a company decides that it is not fair to minimum-wage employees to put them on the front line, is this censorship? Is this moral cowardice? If a school librarian fights to keep a book on the shelf and wins, when the next year's decisions roll around, is she more likely to play it safe and select less controversial books? Is this selection or censorship? Yolen said that the artists should be quicker to praise the clerks and librarians who support them, and much slower to condemn those who have to decide whether to put their jobs and lives on the line for someone else's art.

Biblical Themes in SF and Fantasy
Saturday, 3 PM
Evelyn Leeper (mod), Jeffrey A. Carver, Anne Jordan, Mark Keller, Josepha Sherman

There was no specified moderator for this panel so I volunteered, on the theory that the moderator gets to ask the questions rather than having to come up with answers.

I started by saying that I had begun to suspect that there was a growing trend towards Biblical themes in science fiction and fantasy, having read in short order Norman Spinrad's *Deus X*, Thomas Monteleone's *Blood of the Lamb*, Gore Vidal's *Live from Golgotha*, and Jack Womack's *Elvissey*. I thought this might be attributable to millenialism, but the other panel members seemed to think that this was just part of an oscillating trend, and noted that the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, has always been a major source of literary as well as spiritual inspiration. The stories of Esther, David, Moses, and others lend themselves to retelling in various times and places, including science fictional settings. Mark Keller, in fact, thinks that all of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* is a retelling

of I Kings, with various characters representing Saul, David, Jonathan, the Assyrians, the Egyptians, and so on.

One person asked if all these characters didn't represent Jungian archetypes, but the panelists seemed to feel that while they were archetypal, attaching Jungian significance to them was probably over-kill. People also discussed deuterocanonical and semi-Biblical influences (*The Book of Mormon* for prophetic figures and especially in the work of Orson Scott Card, for example). Some thought that recent discoveries regarding the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Nag Hamadi Library, and other semi-Biblical and pseudepigraphal works might lead to more obscure borrowings. Andrew Greeley is known to rely heavily on Biblical sources, and Harold Bloom's *Flight from Lucifer* was also mentioned (though I can't recall the context).

There was some question as to whether one found more Biblical influences in science fiction or fantasy. At first guess, you might think fantasy, but it turns out that most fantasy is influenced by various other mythologies rather than Biblical, and that it may very well be true that Biblical sources and imagery are used more in science fiction.

Regarding millenialism, it actually began much earlier than the end of the 20th Century, with William Miller preaching the Second Coming of Christ first in 1843, then March 21, 1844, and finally October 22, 1844. As *Grolier's Academic Encyclopedia* says, "The failure of these predictions was a serious setback to the movement [founded by Miller], but Miller and some devoted followers continued to preach the imminent return of Christ." The Seventh-Day Adventists grew out of this movement. Just this past year, in fact, another group predicted the end of the world. If it happened, I didn't notice it. (Then again, there was a group that predicted the end of the world around 1918, and when the time passed, they published a book explaining that the world *had* ended but no one had noticed.)

Someone noted that science fiction used to be about science, but now was perfectly willing to be about religion instead. Someone else said that the two were not unconnected: predestination is basically the religious version of Newtonian mechanics, free will is more related to Einsteinian theories, the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, and the recent theories of chaos.

Religious Intolerance in SF and Fandom
Saturday, 4 PM
Elisabeth Carey (mod), Janice Gelb, Alex Jablokov, Melissa Scott

Carey was worried that this panel would turn into a flame war and so said that the panelists would discuss the topic for a half-hour before taking any questions from the audience. While the discussion may have gotten lively at times, I don't think it was ever near problem proportions.

Jablokov said that the most obvious intolerance was toward religion in general: when one sees religious characters in science fiction or fantasy, they are either "decadent voluptuaries or fanatical fundamentalists." Scott added a third category: Zen masters. The latter at least tend to be portrayed in a non-negative light; at worst they seem to be treated as harmless cranks rather than evil forces. Scott said that one reason for this somewhat slanted view is that religious institutions make easy villains. Also, the most obvious religious people are the most annoying, since they are the proselytizers et al. Frequently the author may have his or her own prejudices against certain organizations. One must be careful not to assume this is always the case, however, since characters in a story may have prejudices independent or even contradictory to those of the author. Still, this provides multiple levels for prejudices to appear in a story. Of course, science fiction must also follow through on its premises (Jablokov gave the example of Donald Kingsbury's *Courtship Rite*). Add to this that writers work with a shared set of assumptions that the readers may not share, and you can see that misunderstandings are almost guaranteed.

Someone (Jablokov, I think) said that all this is what mainstream science fiction fans see, but he noted that there are a large number of science fiction novels published by religious publishers and marketed only in religious bookstores in which religious people are the heroes. One example he gave was a cyberpunk novel in which Southern Baptists are targeted for genocide, but the religious Christian uses his talents to defeat the plot. (Sorry, he didn't give the title or author.)

There is also a tendency to make aliens just like us, only shaped different. Jablokov described this for a story of intelligent dolphins by saying that "dolphin religion is Christianity filtered through several miles of water."

One of the distinctions I asked about was the dividing line between irreverence and intolerance. One response was that to be irreverent one must be a believer, which was not quite what I was asking. Later Gelb said that she drew the line somewhere around the point where people started saying things like, "How can you or any rational person believe such garbage?"

Some people suggested that fandom is an ideology or a religion. I doubt that most people would agree, but to many fans there is definitely a sense of shared beliefs. Of course, one of these beliefs is that openness is good, so fans say what they think, and this is where the statements such as, "Only an idiot could believe such garbage" come from. Jablokov summed it up by saying that the question is not what is true, but what is polite.

Reading
Saturday, 5 PM
Connie Willis

Willis started by giving the audience the option of hearing part of her novella "Uncharted Territory" (which she was delivering to Bantam), or her novelette "Death on the Nile" from the March issue of *Asimov's Science Fiction*. But first she talked about a story that came from her Nebula nomination for "Even the Queen," which appeared in last year's April issue. Apparently people often send out copies of their nominated stories to all SFWA (or is it SFFWA now?) members, with cover letters saying, "In case you missed this, here's a copy in case you might want to consider voting for this for the Nebula award, etc." Usually the copies are extra copies of back issues of the magazines the stories appeared in (though sometimes photocopies were sent if there weren't enough back copies). Anyway, the warehouse in which the back issues of *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* were stored burned down (making all your back issues more valuable in the process), so Willis was looking forward to sending out letters saying, "In case you missed this, here's a copy in case you might want to consider voting for this for the Nebula award, etc.," and enclosing a tablespoon of ashes. However, the copies of "Even the Queen" were sent out before the fire, so she will have to wait until next year's nominations and see if "Death on the Nile" gets nominated.

Anyway, the audience voted in favor of the first part of the novella, so she read that, first explaining that it arose out of what she called her "*Dances with Wolves* rant," which started before the credits on that film had even finished rolling and ended only when her husband threatened to leave her if she didn't stop. (She says the couple who went to the movies with them will never go with them again.) This rant can also be found in abbreviated form in the *Locus* interview mentioned earlier (July 1992 issue). She talked about the fact that Sitting Bull became friends with Buffalo Bill Cody shortly after the Battle of Little Big Horn and toured in Buffalo Bill's road show, which Willis finds hard to comprehend. (In an interesting piece of coincidence, Sitting Bull was killed in the Ghost Dance at Wounded Knee in 1890; the Ghost Dance arose from a millenial cult; we had just discussed millenialism an hour earlier. Okay, so it's *not* an interesting piece of coincidence.) Willis recommended Evan S. Connell's *Son of the Morning Star: Custer & Little Big Horn* (Harper Collins, 1991, 464pp, $10.95) as a good book about that period of history. In addition to objecting to some of the content of *Dances with Wolves*, she also objected to the pedestal that the movie was put on.

Western movies were *not* all one-sided, she pointed out, and films such as *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* made the white men as much or more the villains than the Indians. In any case she emphasized that the West was not simple. While there was some mis-information in older images of the West, she continued, "you correct a stereotype with the truth, not with another stereotype." What happened in the settlement of the West she describes as "a tragedy, not a crime."

Another film that she disliked for its distortion of facts to make a "politically correct" statement was *Fat Man and Little Boy*, which claimed that everyone involved with the atomic bomb knew all about radiation poisoning and other effects of the bomb but used it anyway, rather than the truth, which was that while some people had some idea of the effects, most people thought of it as just a more powerful bomb.

In regard to political correctness, Willis made some additional comments (see also the "History in SF" panel). She said that there are any number of trends and fads in social theory, and that political correctness was one of them. Others she mentioned were the "100th Monkey Theory" and the belief that the American public are sheep. A book she recommended was *Free Speech for Me--But Not for Thee: How the American Left & Right Censor Each Other* by Nat Hentoff (Harper Collins, 1992, 384pp, $25), which discusses the censorship by the Left. In this regard she mentioned the people who want to ban Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* because it uses the word "n---." In fact, she said, it was removed from the school library of a high school named Mark Twain High School! (She didn't said what town or state.) Willis said that it is important to break the ice around ideas, not enshrine some and ban others.

Willis also talked about writing in general. She said she could never understand writers who say their characters get away from them and take on a life of their own. "They're my characters, by God! They will do what I tell them to!" She also said that people say that a book should be about the most important day in a person's life, which would seem to imply that most people should write only one book (unless their lives are on a constant up-track).

Complimented on "Even the Queen," Willis hinted it was her response to people who were big on the idea of celebrating womanhood, but hoped it didn't start a genre of "menstruation-punk" even though it could be considered the "bleeding edge" of science fiction. (I have a great idea for the beginnings of an anthology in the "menstruation-punk" genre if anyone is interested.)

The story itself (remember the story?) seems to be of humans arriving on a "primitive" planet and trying to explore it, except that the indigenous peoples have somehow discovered political correctness, and use it to stymie even the most trivial efforts. For example, driving a vehicle gets the explorers fined for "disturbing planetary surface." I will certainly look for it when it comes out (but then I'm an unrepentant Willis groupie); it will be the first of three novellas Willis does for Bantam in their novella series. In addition, she has another novel set in the *Doomsday Book* universe, tentatively titled *To Say Nothing of the Dog*, but much lighter in tone than *Doomsday Book*, with no deaths--except maybe a cat that everyone keeps trying to kill.

War of the Worlds
Saturday, 8 PM

This consisted of a fifteen-minute radio interview with H. G. Wells and Orson Welles, followed by the famous broadcast. I had heard the broadcast many times, and was interested in the slide show they put together to go with it, but that turned out to be a bit of a disappointment, since there weren't very many slides (they tended to leave a slide up for two or three minutes), they reused slides (the same farm picture showed up about five times), and the slides weren't always in focus. It was a good idea, though, and with a bit more effort on the visual side could be quite good. After all, it's basically what Ken Burns did with his "Civil War" series (and all his other documentaries, for that matter).

The Cross-Time Bus: A Comic Play by Joe Mayhew
Saturday, 10 PM
Bruce Coville, Esther Friesner, Joe Haldeman, Chip Hitchcock, Suford Lewis, Joe Mayhew,
Greg Thokar, Mike Zipser

Waiting for this to begin, I found out that somewhere there is a betting pool going on how long my next convention report will be. I just want to mention that for the right price, I can adjust the length to suit. :-)

The play itself was *not* an alternate history (which I had thought it might be), but was just a comic play about someone building a time travel machine (bus, actually), then taking a bunch of Dungeons & Dragons players back to King Arthur's time. Amusing enough, though some of the characters got wearisome after a while. Maybe I was just tired.

At the end they brought out a big birthday cake and everyone sang "Happy Birthday" to Suford Lewis, whose birthday it was. (She had agreed to pinch-hit for Jane Yolen, who was originally supposed to be in the play but was not feeling well.)

After the play, I dropped into the Baltimore in '98 party. As I said before, I was *not* impressed. Time will tell; there are still more than two years before the site selection for 1998.

The Green Room

One of the interesting things about the Green Room is the conversations one overhears. Sunday morning I came in just in time to hear Esther Friesner say, "Do you have any idea how big a walrus's penis is?!" I'm sure she had a good explanation....

She also donated Laura Kinsale's *The Shadow and the Star* (from one of the racier lines of romance novels) to the Green Room reading material supply. Most people stuck to the Sunday *Times* instead.

Comedy in SF and Fantasy
Sunday, 11 AM
Connie Willis (mod), Bradley Denton, Esther Friesner, Craig Shaw Gardner, Laura Ann
Gilman, Jeff Hecht

The first thing I learned from this panel is that it is impossible to convey a humorous panel in print, but this will be my humble attempt.

One of the first questions after everyone on the panel mentioned their latest or funniest books was what people answer when asked, "Why do you write funny fantasy?" Friesner said she does it to aggravate people who ask. Someone once read something of hers and said, "You're not from this planet." She wasn't sure if that was supposed to be a compliment or not. The question, "Why do you write funny fantasy?" seems odd; did people ask P. G. Wodehouse why he wrote humor? On the other hand, Woody Allen said, "If you write comedy, you are not sitting at the adult table."

Someone asked if the panelists enjoyed writing humor, because most writers seem to say they hate writing in general. Willis responded, "I loathe and despise every moment of my writing career. I hate writing." The panelists felt that writing comedy is *technically* much more difficult than writing a serious book, especially these days with what someone called the "That's not funny" generation. (Political correctness seemed to be a running thread through the convention.) On the other hand, some people felt that political correctness was a boon. Denton announced that his new novel

Blackburn has been objected to on moral grounds, so he's hoping sales will skyrocket! And Willis said, "I am pleased beyond measure to do irreparable harm to the radical feminist movement."

Denton talked about reading a section of a work of his in which one of the male protagonist's gets shot, first in the crotch and then in the eye. After the first shot, the audience laughed, but after the second there was a shocked silence, after which Denton concluded that "the difference between comedy and tragedy is getting shot in the balls or shot in the eye." As far as *verboten* topics for humor, Friesner felt that harm to children was out. Hecht said that he wouldn't write anything that would cause pain to someone he knew.

No panel on comedy in science fiction and fantasy would be complete without recommendations, so here they are: the "Burke Breathed" cartoons, the works of L. Frank Baum, various works by Frederic Brown, *Stalking the Angel* by Robert Crais (Bantam, 1992, $4.99), *The Incomplete Enchanter* by L. Sprague deCamp and Fletcher Pratt, "The Santa Claus Compromise" by Thomas M. Disch (in Harry Harrison and Brian Aldiss's *Best SF: 1975*), "Melpomene, Calliope ... and Fred" by Nicholas V. Yermakov (someone said this was George Alec Effinger, but I'm not sure that's correct) (available in Arthur Saha's *Year's Best Fantasy Stories: 7*), the "Cathy" cartoons by Cathy Guisewite, "Stable Strategies for Middle Management" by Eileen Gunn, the "Stainless Steel Rat" series by Harry Harrison, *Expecting Someone Taller* and *Who's Afraid of Beowulf?* (Ace, 1990, $4.50; Ace, 1991, $4.50) by Tom Holt, *Three Men in a Boat* by Jerome K. Jerome (Penguin, 1978, $5.95), the "Pogo" strips by Walt Kelly, *Blue Heaven* and *Putting on the Ritz* by Joe Keenan (Penguin, 1988, $7.95; Penguin, 1992, $10), *Apparent Wind* by Dallas Murphy (Pocket Books, 1991, $4.99), various works of Lewis Padgett, *Die for Love* and *Naked Once More* (Tor, 1991, $3.99; Warner, 1990, $4.95) by Elizabeth Peters, "Mail Supremacy" by Hayford Peirce (available in Isaac Asimov and Martin Greenberg's *100 Short Short Science Fiction Stories*), *Good Omens* by Neil Gaiman (this was mentioned by someone who recommended all of Terry Pratchett's works and then mentioned this specifically, forgetting this wasn't written by Pratchett) (Berkley, 1992, $8.95) various works by Richard Rankin, the "Samurai Cat" works by Mark E. Rogers, various works by Thorne Smith, the "Aquiliad" series by Somtow Sucharitkul (a.k.a. S. M. Somtow), almost anything by Howard Waldrop, and *Cosmic Banditos* by A. C. Weisbecker (Vintage, 1986, $5.95).

(Making this list makes me wonder if all these recommendations that people make on panels are actually used by anyone. If I hadn't been trying to take notes for a convention report, I wouldn't be able to tell you what was recommended. I suppose it's possible that seeing one of the mentioned books in a store, I might recall that I had heard something about it, but possibly not even whether it was a recommendation or a warning.)

Kaffeeklatsch
Sunday, noon
Connie Willis

First off, everyone congratulated Willis on her two Nebula nominations (for *Doomsday Book* and "Even the Queen").

I asked her about a comment she had made earlier about people telling her she had to get off the fence. This fence was not the fence between humor and serious writing, but the fence between the Left and the Right (for lack of better terms). People kept saying she had to take sides, but Willis says, "No!" Women keep telling her about her "responsibility to her sisters," but Willis says her responsibility is to the truth, and that anyway, she thought women's liberation meant that she could have the freedom to write about what she wanted to write about. She mentioned she had written an editorial for the October 1992 issue of *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction* in response to the attitude that there were no women writing science fiction until Ursula LeGuin and Joanna Russ "stormed the barricades." In the editorial, Willis talked about how there have always been women writing science

fiction, and how many of them were major influences on her. She also said that the major influence on her was probably Robert Heinlein's juveniles, and that any science fiction writer who claims otherwise is probably trying to be politically correct rather than honest. Most of the authors she mentioned are out of print now (because of the Thor Power Tool tax ruling making keeping backlist books too expensive; one can hope that electronic libraries will help get around this problem).

Two recent works which have influenced her writing are D'Souza's *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race & Sex on Campus* (Random House, 1992, 300pp, $12) and Wendy Kaminer's *I'm Dysfunctional, You're Dysfunctional: The Recovery Movement & Other Self-Help Fashions* (Addison-Wesley, 1992, 176pp, $18.22). A work that influenced *Doomsday Book* in particular was Katherine Anne Porter's "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," a story set in the 1918 influenza plague.

A personal influence on Willis's work was something that happened to her when she was about ten. Her mother dropped off her and her younger sister at the movies before going shopping, saying that when they got out they should wait right in front of the movie until 4 PM, when she would come pick them up. Something happened--her sister fell and hit her head or something--and her sister started crying loudly, and Willis didn't know what to do, so she looked at the clock and saw it was 3:30. Figuring her mother would be along soon, she took her sister outside and waited a while. Then she looked at the clock (through the door) again, and realized she had read the clock wrong before and it was only 2:30 (or maybe even earlier--I didn't write down all the details). She knew they couldn't go back in, but she had a dime, so she went to a phone and tried calling home in case her father was there. But her grandfather, who was somewhat senile, answered the phone and then hung up. Now she had no money and no idea what to do. Just as she was about to panic completely, her father came down the street.

It seems he had been home in the yard and heard the phone ring, but couldn't get to it before her grandfather answered and hung up. Still, he thought that *maybe* it was Willis calling because she was in trouble and just in case, he decided to go to the theater and check. Willis said that the feeling of relief she felt when she saw him coming was something she would never forget, and this incident can be seen in many of her works, she says, in the themes of rescue and of decision-making from insufficient information. I also see a parallel in the adolescent girl in *Doomsday Book* who must act as an adult. (Note: her father asked the ticket-seller if the two girls could have gone back into the theater. "Of course," she said, but it had never occurred to Willis to ask.)

Writing about history can be difficult. Willis says it's hard to write about the Civil War because too many people know *everything* and will catch any mistake you make. (On the other hand, there are also those who will ask, "Who's this Grant character?") Other eras may not be as well known; when the authors were writing *1776* (the musical), they discovered that they couldn't use some of the best lines people had said, because everyone would think they were made up. For example, one of the principals said that unless the issue of slavery were decided then, within a hundred years it would tear the country apart. These are documented in an appendix to the published script, in case anyone is interested.

Shared Worlds and Share-cropped Worlds
Sunday, 1 PM
Lisa Barnett, Gregory Feeley, Evelyn C. Leeper, Don Sakers

This panel started with everyone on it saying they had no idea why they were on it. But given that we were here, we made the best of it. (My only idea was that I am known as a fan of Sherlock Holmes pastiches and parodies, and what are all the new Holmes novels and stories but a shared world?)

First, what is the difference between "shared worlds" and "share-cropped worlds"? (The latter term

was coined by Richard Curtis, by the way.) Shared worlds are those in which the authors all participate equally (more or less). Examples would include the "Liavek" and "Wild Cards" series. Share-cropped worlds, on the other hand, are those which one person controls, for which authors are hired to work within limits and constraints set by the owner, and for which the owner gets a payment even if he or she has not done any of the writing. Examples of this would be the "Isaac Asimov's Robot City" novels or the "Roger Zelazny's Alien Speedway" novels. Share-cropped worlds are also referred to as franchise fiction. (I noted that novelizations of films also fall in this category to some extent; later it was observed that all writing for non-anthology television series would also be franchise fiction.)

The earliest example of "shared worlds" that anyone could name was the "Twayne Triplets," in which three authors started from the same planetary description to create independent novels. Of them, only James Blish's *Case of Conscience* remains well-known. The technique of "world-building" and then handing out the world to a variety of authors continues even now though.

Share-cropped worlds are what I also refer to as "Fred Nobody Writing in the World of Joe Hugo-Winner," usually with Fred Nobody's name in five-point type and Joe Hugo-Winner's in twenty-point type. Someone else suggested that perhaps some of these books needed to have on the cover something like "Isaac Asimov had absolutely nothing to do with this book" in large type. Many people agreed that much franchise fiction was like strip-mining: taking a profitable setting and churning out works as fast as possible with no concern about whether they were destroying any possibility of creating genuinely original works in that setting later on. Of course, for authors who have salable settings and who are too old or ill to continue writing in them, this does not seem to be as big a concern.

Share-cropping can also include co-authoring, although the obvious drawback here is that all good writing will be attributed to the established author and all bad writing will be blamed on the new author. This assumes an old author/new author pairing, of course. In general, this is the case, but there are exceptions. For example Robert Silverberg collaborated with Isaac Asimov in expanding Asimov's "Ugly Little Boy" into a novel. But in this instance, the line between the two is clearly drawn and relatively well-known--Silverberg wrote everything that didn't appear in the original short story. Another exception was the collection *Foundation's Friends*, in which well-known authors were all asked to write tribute stories for Asimov set in Asimov's universe. But again, this is a special case, and it is obvious what is the author's and what is the "owner's."

Feeley said that sometimes even established authors will go into the franchise fiction field as the "junior partner." Michael Kube-McDowell, he said, felt that writing one of the "Robot City" novels would help his career, particularly if it were filed next to his other books, because then people who liked the one might buy the others. Someone pointed out this doesn't work nearly as well if all the "Robot City" books are filed together under Asimov, which seemed to be where I saw them. Well-known authors are used in some series, particularly the "Star Trek" and "Star Wars" series, to revive declining interest by providing a novel that is a marked improvement over other recent entries. (I should note here that a recent *Science Fiction Chronicle* reports that Michael Kube-McDowell would like to drop the "Kube" and become just Michael P. McDowell, but due to the number of "Michael McDowell"'s writing, he is having some difficulty. For now, one should consider him to be Michael P. McDowell writing under the pseudonym "Michael Kube-McDowell." I consider this is yet further evidence that changing one's name at marriage can lead to complications down the line; the "Kube" in this case refers to a marriage dissolved five years ago.)

Someone compared the whole franchising system to Amway: Mercedes Lackey started by writing in Anne McCaffrey's universe, and now other authors are writing in Mercedes Lackey's universe. This is all reminiscent of Renaissance paintings, where (for example) many paintings attributed to Rembrandt turned out to be merely "from the school of Rembrandt."

Someone brought up the issue of "moral rights to copyright." In the United States, and under the Berne Convention in general, such a concept is not recognized, but in Britain it is (apparently). As I understand it, this means that if someone produces a work-for-hire, whether a franchise novel or a drawing in their capacity as artist for a company or some other work for which the copyright is owned by someone else, the actual artist still has some control over how that work is used. So someone who wrote a franchise novel could prevent the copyright owner from changing the hero from defeating the villain in a duel to stabbing him in the back, or someone who painted a mother and child to advertise soap flakes could prevent having that illustration used to promote an anti-choice candidate. (Disclaimer: I may have misunderstood what was being described, but this is what I think I heard.) I also think that this prevents someone from claiming to have produced a work actually produced by someone else.

The discussion of issues of ownership led one audience member to point out that folk music (outside of science fiction fandom) and fan fiction (within it) ignore ownership. The latter has resulted in some unpleasant legal ramifications for some of those who have "appropriated" another author's world, especially if the appropriator has asked first and was refused. It's difficult to plead ignorance in such a case. The recent *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* by Henry Jenkins (Routledge, 1992, $15.95) discusses this at great length in the context of television and film fandoms (e.g., "Star Trek" fandom, "Beauty and the Beast" fandom). The desire to write in someone else's universe is not limited to fans, of course--someone said that even Joanna Russ had written a K/S story, which was available only as samizdat, of course. (No, I have no idea where you can get it. Don't bother to ask.) Someone else claimed that Mark Twain wrote a Sherlock Holmes parody; I don't know what that one is either, but if you do, please let me know.

There are also works that are co-authored without being share-cropped, or shared beyond the co-authors. (A shared world implies more than one work, and different authors involved for different works. Niven and Pournelle have written two "Motie" novels, but this does not make it a shared world.) The problem with co-authoring, or collaboration, someone said, is that each partner does 90% of the work.

To wrap up, I said, "I would like to think that there is some way for an established author to mentor a new author, but I don't think this [share-cropping] is it, because it diminishes both the established author and the new author." Amazingly, the other panelists felt that summed it up quite nicely.

Leaving

Even leaving was an adventure. Because of our dead battery, we needed to find someone who could give us a jump. Jeff Hecht kindly did so, and it still took ten minutes of cranking to get our engine to catch. (We replaced the battery when we got home.) On the way home, we stopped for dinner at Traveler Restaurant Book Cellar in Union, Connecticut. The upstairs is a restaurant with a gimmick: "a free book with every meal," though the books are of the sort one would find at the end of the day in a rummage sale and the food is undistinguished. The walls are covered with autographed photographs of famous authors, most of whom probably never ate there but sent autographed pictures when asked. The basement is a regular used bookstore with very reasonable prices. (I found Harlan Ellison's *Stalking the Nightmare* from Phantasia Press for $3.50, for example.) It's out in the middle of nowhere, but probably worth a visit if you're passing by on your way between New York and Boston.

Miscellaneous

Membership seems to have *firmly* settled in around 900, in spite of the return to the Boston area. Framingham is still not convenient enough to public transportation to show a really big increase over

Springfield.

Next year for Boskone 31 (February 18-20, 1994) the Guests of Honor are Emma Bull and Will Shetterly, and Special Guests of Honor are Patrick Nielsen Hayden and Theresa Nielsen Hayden.

Evelyn C. Leeper may be reached via e-mail or you may visit her Homepage.