Boskone 34

A convention report by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Index:

Boskone 34 was held February 14-16, 1997, in Framingham, Massachusetts. (It had originally been announced for the following weekend, but was changed back.) I think we set a record for driving time, at just about four and a half hours (there was *no* traffic). Much better than last year's eight and three- quarters! Kate arrived just as we were checking in, having had to wait quite a while for the bus in Amherst (all the buses were apparently full by the time they got there).

Attendance was about the same as last year, still holding around eight hundred warm bodies. While last year people were saying it was growing each year, now they seem to think it has leveled off.

One thing every Green Room should have is a large clock, so that panelists know how long until their next panel. (Hint, hint.)

The Dealers Room had the usual suspects, except that Tales from the White Hart wasn't there, and was replaced by a non-book table. Dealers seemed to think sales were somewhat slow.

Ask Dr. Mike - Boskone 101

Fri 8:30PM
John M. Ford

Description: "Wherein our GoH tells you all about us. (Harummph.)"

We went to this, but it still hadn't started about fifteen minutes into the time slot, and when the committee decided to do finger plays to pass the time, we decided to leave.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. E-mail

Description: "Why do perfectly nice people turn into ravening monsters when they're on email? Why do mild-mannered fans engage in flame-wars with perfect strangers? Is it the nature of the medium that one can feel anonymous and hence free of the usual social controls? Is it that email feels like a conversation? How can one avoid flame wars? When one starts, what's the best way to cool it down?"

One problem with this panel is that the panelists tended to confuse private email, mailing lists, and bulletin boards/newsgroups, or at least to discuss them all indiscriminately, though Gary Farber (in the audience) tried to at least point out that there were various types.

As to why (supposedly) nice people turn nasty, Jaffe suggested that two factors were distance and the lack of aural (or visual) clues. Nielsen Hayden said that this is true of all exchanges, but only some do this (presumably intentionally) to flame people. Jaffe thought perhaps it was a question of who thought they could get away with it.

Cramer reiterated that the reader of a e-mail can't hear irony, and can't see a "posture of doubt." And "respectable academics will behave just as badly as the worst assholes on the Net," she observed. Nielsen Hayden agreed that intelligence didn't seem to be a critical factor, since of the two worst flamers she knew, one was a very sensitive reader, and the other was "not entirely slow about it." She also noted, "*We* don't do that--most of the time."

Cramer said that one thing she had learned (from someone else's experience) was, "Do not answer your email when you're drunk," though Jaffe said, "I don't know; for some people it would be an improvement."

Nielsen Hayden said that her husband Patrick said that sometimes what happens when you meet someone who is very nice to you and who then flames you is that the event that a person was responding to happened after your interaction, either because of reading lag, or because he later brooded about it.

Cramer said that people wouldn't do this at a convention with a microphone, so it's probably something about seeing live human beings that makes people hold back. Jaffe agreed, saying that you often feel you're writing to a machine rather than a person. Cramer said even when you think you're writing to a person, you may feel you are writing one or two people rather than the thousands who read a group.

Someone in the audience asked if people flame people they have met or will meet. Jaffe immediately said, "Yes," and Cramer said she is flamed only by people who know her. Nielsen Hayden said she has been flamed by both people who know her and people who don't.

At this point, Macdonald arrived (late) and immediately started flaming everyone on the panel, which Nielsen Hayden labeled trolling.

Someone from the audience said that long before email, people wrote letters, so what is the difference? This was not really answered, except to say that there was flaming before. Someone else claimed that on the Net there were no calls for factual material or the presentation thereof, but Nielsen Hayden and Jaffe pointed out that this is true in print as well.

Jaffe said that part of the problem is the immediacy of email, and Cramer thought that science fiction people have far too many facts at their fingers. (This seems to contradict the idea that there is no factual material.) Nielsen Hayden said that the problem was that science fiction people have attention

spans that are far too long.

When asked about how to respond to flames, Cramer (perhaps responding to Farber's distinctions) said that the best response on Usenet is too ignore it, but on listservs you can't. Farber said this was something like the difference between a hit-and-run and a family feud. Cramer said that when she was involved in a flame war, "I discovered I had more friends than enemies."

Macdonald said that you can try to avoid flames on Usenet, but even if someone flames you in an obscure group, someone else will be sure to tell you. And Ben Yalow (in the audience) noted that although a paper fanzine may have a couple of dozen copies, newsgroups are everywhere and archived forever.

Cramer asked, "Is the moral of this story 'if you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all'?" Nielsen Hayden thought the real moral was always to keep copies. (Even though everything is archived.) Macdonald said, "I'm writing a lot less on the Net because I've already made those arguments a thousand times."

As for how to respond to flamers, Nielsen Hayden felt a good response was a denigrating, "Is that it? We thought you were a really hot flamer, but ...." Jaffe preferred, "Thank you for sharing that." Yalow suggested "pouring oil on troubled fires": escalating until you have made the last reasonable comment (which I described as "flamewar NIM"). This requires great skill, however. Yalow also suggested that when flamers write ironically, you should agree with their stated text. Nielsen Hayden said that whenever Truman got flamed, he would write an angry letter in response--and then not mail it. She said, "If you ever think, 'There, that'll settle their hash,' don't mail it."

David Hartwell (in the audience) said he had more of a problem with confidently stated misinformation rather than with overt flame. People sometimes try to correct these, but sometimes corrections are incorrect. Someone claimed they had read a discussion of what the Beatles names were in which no one posting got all four right. I find this hard to believe, even though Nielsen Hayden said, "Error and stupidity are oceanic." And Cramer added, "There is no consensus reality."

Jean McGuire (in the audience) thought that "authoritative idiots" are a temporary phenomenon. People used to trust print; now they trust the screen. (Farber mentioned Pierre Salinger.) Will people get smarter vis- a-vis the Net? There were mixed opinions. Jaffe said that because the Net is a source of information, people will tend to trust the idiots there more. And because of this, the really good spoofs are gone (kremvax, Microsoft Buys "U") because the crafters fear they will be believed. But the PenPals virus, Craig Shergold, etc., are still with us. Jane Yolen (in the audience) noted, "It used to take months or years for urban legends to move around. Now it's quick."

Farber thought all this was good: it gives people insight into others' world views and makes people more skeptical. And Patrick Nielsen Hayden (in the audience) said, "People say we are becoming more gullible, but where is that Utopia we supposedly left?"

And sometimes arguing with flamers is hopeless, as with the one who told Teresa Nielsen Hayden, "Yes, but I have superior perceptions of objective reality."

How To Turn a Good Book into a Bad Movie

Fri 10:00PM
John M. Ford, Daniel Kimmel (m), Mark R. Leeper, Jim Mann, Steven Sawicki

Description: "Why would anyone allow their masterpiece--a good book which has given pleasure to many, and brought recognition to its author--to be made into a mediocre movie which misses the book of the book, anyway? (Well, the money. Yes, a good point. But other than that....) What is it

about Hollywood which tends to make bad movies from good books? Is it inherent in the translation from one medium to another? Is it because of Hollywood's politics and culture? Cite examples of good SF books which have made bad movies. Why were the movies bad? Could this have been remedied? Does SF suffer more or less than other genres when its books are made into movies?"

During the introductions, Leeper mentioned he was infected by some particularly virulent bacteria, to which Sawicki responded, "How viral is that bacteria?" Ford expressed some astonishment at this question, leading Sawicki to note, "This is the movies;, I don't have to be accurate." "Oh, you're Michael Crichton," was Ford's rejoinder.

Anyway, the panelists first addressed what movies they liked that have been based on sources that they also liked. Mann mentioned the BBC DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS, and the PBS LATHE OF HEAVEN. Ford listed the 1980 DEATHWATCH (from THE UNSLEEPING EYE by D. G. Compton, a.k.a. THE CONTINUOUS KATHERINE MORTENHOE), THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN, COLOSSUS: THE FORBIN PROJECT, and (if we extend this to fantasy) THE HAUNTING. Kimmel named the 1986 version of THE FLY (based on what he calls a flawed original), and BLADERUNNER (also based on a flawed original, Philip K. Dick's DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP). Leeper added NO HIGHWAY IN THE SKY and QUEST FOR LOVE (another flawed original), and Sawicki suggested OVERDRAWN AT THE MEMORY BANK (again, from a flawed original), and the 1954 version of 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA, as well as reiterating BLADERUNNER. (Kimmel said of BLADERUNNER that he doesn't like the voice-over because *he* as a critic wants to do the explaining.)

Next the panelists listed good books that had been turned into bad movies. Sawicki thought this included pretty much anything by Steven King (although Kimmel said he thought King is just a hack writer and the books weren't very good either). Ford said it was hard to make a movie of THE HAUNTING that has the psychological complexities of the book, and this was also true of A CLOCKWORK ORANGE. Kimmel thought that "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale" was much better than the movie TOTAL RECALL (which he said was basically a new story). Leeper listed ENEMY MINE, CHARLY, DUNE, MARY REILLY, THE PUPPET MASTERS, and (from what he had heard) NIGHTFALL and THE COLD EQUATIONS. Kimmel agreed on NIGHTFALL, and added SCREAMERS (also based on a Dick story, "Second Variety").

Ford agreed on THE COLD EQUATIONS, saying that it had been done reasonably well for "The New Twilight Zone," and that the problem is often that films stretch or compress too much. Mann thought John Carpenter's version of THE THING was a bad film from a good original, even though Kimmel pointed out that Carpenter was more accurate than the earlier film. Mann said one problem was that the characters in the Carpenter film were too annoying.

Ford suggested one good rule for filmmakers is "Don't film what you don't have the resources to film." Sawicki thought that part of the problem was the collaborative nature of the filmmaking process, citing the adage that "camels are horses created by committee." However, Ford noted, camels work. Mann disagreed on a more basic level, saying that good films are the result of a good creative team, and the origin isn't that important.

Kimmel mentioned at this point that movies don't knock books out of print, and so a bad movie does not really hurt the book. However, there are often novelizations of movies based on books or stories that can overshadow the original source. Ford said, "There was a novelization of TOTAL RECALL by that most Dickian of current writers, Piers Anthony. Well, I keep hearing he's a dick." (Ford also said that Zelazny knew DAMNATION ALLEY was in trouble when he heard they had hired a cockroach wrangler.) On the other hand, someone said that COLOSSUS and THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN are keeping so-so books in print.

Kimmel pointed out that authors usually have no control over their works after the stories are sold to

the filmmaker. Even when they have some input, it may not mean anything. John Norman (a philosophy professor in "real life") had consulting privileges on the Gor movies, Kimmel said, and objected to a villain named "Xeno," since Xeno was one of the great Greek philosophers. So they changed it to "Zeno."

Someone in the audience asked about films based on other media, such as comic books (e.g., BATMAN, SUPERMAN, and TANK GIRL). Kimmel said that the question was, "Are these films true to their source?" to which Ford replied, "You mean, do they sell toys?" Regarding adapting comic books, Sawicki pointed out, "When you read DUNE, you create your own images. When you read BATMAN, you're seeing Bob Kane's images."

According to the panelists, filmmakers need to know what to keep and what to throw away. Examples of this were given by Kimmel (SPELLBOUND) and Mann (JAWS). Someone in the audience also suggested that one "trick" is to match the length of the work to the length of the movie.

Someone in the audience asked about Ellison's script for I, ROBOT, which she thought would make a great movie. But Sawicki pointed out that it reads like a novel, is not at all visual, and is too long (at 180 pages, it would run four-and-a-half hours).

Regarding someone comment or question about movies where the visuals are great, but the movie isn't, Ford noted that Ron Cobb provided the visuals for Dune, but he wasn't writing the script or doing any of the other creative work. Kimmel claimed, "Dune is a terribly, terribly flawed movie." Kimmel also warned about movies directed by "Alan Smithee" or written by "Cordwainer Bird." (The former is the name required by the Directors Guild if a director wants to take his or her real name off the film. The latter is Harlan Ellison's pseudonym if he thinks his writing has been tampered with.)

I asked, "Is it easier to make a radio drama?" Kimmel mentioned a new series, "Alien Voices." Mann said that one major advantage with radio is that there is no attempt to substitute special effects for plot.

Ford mentioning other media for science fiction, including a book called NOT SINCE CARRIE, which is about Broadway flops. As he said, the primary rule is "Don't make a musical out of something that had no business being a musical."

An audience member asked if science fiction was harder to make into a movie than other genres. Kimmel thought so, because there are more questions (where? when?) than there are in other genres.

Leeper said that the television version of THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY was too literal with Zaphod's second head, and that the radio version worked better. Someone in the audience said that this was in part because every time they tried filming scenes, *something* would go wrong and the scenes which looked the best were those in which only the second head looked wrong. However, Ford pointed out, "Movies about people with two heads have a pretty poor record" in general.

Sawicki said that STARSHIP TROOPERS will be bad because "the book is about suits" and the suits are not right in the movie.

Ford observed, "MISSION IMPOSSIBLE was a lousy version of MISSION IMPOSSIBLE, and INDEPENDENCE DAY was a lousier version of PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE."

Leeper summed up by saying, "Don't try and copy something people love. Try to copy something people don't have a strong attachment to."

Kimmel said that a book needs one strong character, theme, or idea, but a movie requires more. "A powerful original vision will be diminished by the cooperative process, while a more mediocre vision can be improved."

Non-SF Films that Fans Like

Sat 10:00AM
Claire Anderson, Connie Hirsch, Daniel Kimmel, Mark R. Leeper (m)

Description: "What are the non-SF films that SF fans like? Are there any inn particular? Is this any different than the non-SF films liked by any random, educated person? List some non-SF films that you particularly like. Why do you like them? Is there any connection that you can see to your taste for SF? Do you think other SF fans would like them?"

Hirsch began by asking, "Which fans are we talking about? The normal guy who watches STAR TREK and BABYLON 5?" Kimmel responded, "That already proves how relevant the word 'normal' is."

Hirsch suggested that for whatever unspecified fan they were talking about, foreign films might be enjoyable, especially samurai films. Why foreign films? Well, they are often based in a completely different society, the sort of thing that characterizes a lot of science fiction. Leeper suggested that Indian films are enjoyable, and usually rentable from Indian groceries. (There is a language barrier, but we discovered that for action films, it doesn't seem to be that big a problem.) Hirsch recommended EAGLES SHOOTING HEROES, a parody of Indian films. Anderson named GOD IS MY WITNESS and Kimmel recommended the (not yet released) KAMA SUTRA by Mira Nair.

Kimmel said that he also liked 1930s screwball comedies, but not necessarily because he's a science fiction fan.

Kimmel suggested that if you like a science fiction film by a director, see other films by that director. For example, if you like THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD, you might like other films directed by Howard Hawks. (Yes, the official directing credit is for Christian Nyby, but it's generally conceded that Hawks was the actual director.) Similarly, if you like Ridley Scott's ALIEN, try some of his other films.

Leeper noted that if the question was specifically about science fiction films, then the obvious suggestion was be fantasy and horror films. Also, historical adventure films do a reasonable job of creating a world. Kimmel seconded this, but warned against seeing some of the more spectacular ones (such as LAWRENCE OF ARABIA) on the small screen. He said that now whenever he sees THE WIZARD OF OZ, he expects commercial breaks because that's how he saw it for years. He also digressed by saying that for frightening films (e.g., JUMANJI), he sometimes suggests parents apply the "flying monkey test": if your kids were frightened by the flying monkeys in THE WIZARD OF OZ, then this film will probably be too intense.

Kimmel was not an uncritical fan of historical films, though; he said that THE ENGLISH PATIENT was "like watching paint dry": the characters are all stick figures.

Many films SF fans would like are "art house films": Ian McKellen's RICHARD III, BREAKING THE WAVES, CRONOS. (These are actually within the SF genre, but not marketed as such.)

Someone in the audience mentioned Branagh's HENRY V, but said that BRAVEHEART had anachronisms. Leeper pointed out that it was inaccurate as well. Hirsch thought Branagh should have turned the soundtrack in HAMLET down quite a bit, and that he should not have moved around as much. Leeper said that it was a much more traditional HAMLET than we expected from Branagh.

Kimmel mentioned Hitchcock and Hirsch noted they are remaking six of Hitchcock's films. (I've just heard that Christopher Reeve star in the remake of REAR WINDOW.) Hirsch thought Robert Rodriguez's films would appeal to SF fans. People in the audience listed a variety of films: THE LION IN WINTER: PRISCILLA, QUEEN OF THE DESERT; A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS; 12 MONKEYS (this is SF, of course). Kimmel thought the latter too long, but still admitted that it was interesting and he liked it. He also recommended PHANTOM OF THE PARADISE.

Someone asked the panelists to list their favorite movies. Leeper said A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS and SCHINDLER'S LIST. Hirsch named I KNOW WHERE I'M GOING by Powell and Pressburger, and GET CRAZY (a.k.a. FLIP OUT). Kimmel's favorites were ANNIE HALL and THE PRODUCERS. (He noted in passing that EVERYONE SAYS I LOVE YOU proves why that style of musical is dead; EVITA is a 90s musical but it has no second act.) Hirsch named THE UMBRELLAS OF CHERBOURG and THE THIRD MAN.

Hirsch said that another category of films that might appeal to fans of science fiction movies is the category of submarine films. Leeper extended this to what he termed "technological movies," and listed THE DAM BUSTERS, THE BRIDGE OVER THE RIVER KWAI, TUCKER, THE RACE FOR THE DOUBLE HELIX, and LORENZO'S OIL.

Anderson thought science fiction fans would like movies about food: TAMPOPO, LIKE WATER FOR CHOCOLATE, BABETTE'S FEAST, THE BIG NIGHT, and THE GOD OF COOKERY; Hirsch added THE CHINESE FEAST.

Kimmel suggested Peter Greenaway's films as being offbeat enough for science fiction fan: THE DRAUGHTMAN'S CONTRACT; DROWNING BY NUMBERS; PROSPERO'S BOOKS; ZED AND TWO NAUGHTS; and THE COOK, THE THIEF, HIS WIFE, AND THEIR LOVER, Leeper noted that the last was really nothing more than a story that could have been taken from EC Comics.

Someone in the audience recommended SILVERADO, leading Kimmel to suggest Westerns in general: STAGECOACH, THE SEARCHERS, HIGH NOON, and RED RIVER.

Hirsch named Keaton's silent films, which Leeper pointed out were often technology-related. Hirsch also named SAFETY LAST with Harold Lloyd.

Someone in the audience recommended THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD, the new biopic about Robert E. Howard. (There are a lot of other biopics of genre authors that probably should have been named as well: GOTHIC, SHADOWLANDS, etc.) Final recommendations from the panel were HIDDEN FORTRESS (Anderson), WELCOME TO THE DOLLHOUSE (Hirsch), THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING (Leeper), and FARGO (Kimmel).

SF and Political Correctness

Sat 11:00AM
N. Taylor Blanchard, Ginjer Buchanan, Janice M. Eisen, Peter J. Heck (m)

Description: "Does modern SF strive for political correctness? If so, why and how? Has this affected the quality of the material? For better or worse? If not, should it? Are fans 'pc' or not?"

The panelists began by noting they were a politically correct assortment of panelists.

The panelists said they wanted to make a distinction, as well as the similarity, between political correctness and censorship.

Buchanan started by saying, "We've become increasingly sensitive to what words are used and how

people are presented." However, she added, this often leads to "increased [but] somewhat misplaced sensitivity." She admitted she has at times suggested alternate word choices. "It's an issue but is it a problem?" But censorship is not an issue, she added.

Eisen said that she once got a letter about use of "black" to equal "evil." Her reaction was that, yes, it is traditional, but why offend people unnecessarily?

Blanchard said, "Political correctness is the inability to take a joke." As an artist, he claimed, "Political correctness doesn't affect art because art has never been politically correct." In part, this is because art is more market-driven by the individual purchaser (for a painter or sculptor) than by the general populace. An artist can displease many people; s/he need please only one. An illustrator is in a different area or category: s/he has to please the art director, the sales person, the buyer for B. Dalton, etc.

As far as the effect political correctness has had on the illustrator, before, Blanchard said, an art director might deliberately *not* want a black character on the cover. Now, they're more likely to *want* one of a group to be black, female, or whatever. Eisen asked if it still happens that black characters get portrayed as white on cover; Blanchard said not really. In general, people are just tired of the older, "non-politically- correct," "brass-bra" images. Buchanan said that media-driven fiction has had the good effect of making the covers more integrated. Since "Star Trek" novels have Lieutenant Uhura, Captain Sisko, and others, and sell just fine, other covers have started doing this as well.

Buchanan said that "genre science fiction is being perceived in publishing as an increasingly marginalized thing," so there's less pressure to make everyone white to cater to a wide market. Fantasy books (and covers) still look less integrated because, according to Buchanan, fantasy is mostly locked into a northern Europe/Celtic look. But Blanchard feels it is expanding to other areas, and Eisen pointed out that LeGuin's "Earthsea" books have red and black characters, with the barbarians being white. However, they are never portrayed this way on the covers.

Buchanan said that the desire for political correctness can lead to such anachronisms as Morgan Freeman in ROBIN HOOD, PRINCE OF THIEVES.

Heck said that political correctness is sometimes a form of self- censorship. The artist who was originally going to do the cover for J. Calvin Pierce's WIZARD OF AMBERMERE decided that as a fundamentalist Christian he couldn't paint the demon required. Someone asked, "Do you see authors deliberately biting their tongue" over writing? Buchanan said, "Those within our little pond have absorbed the PC concepts of eliminating the 'shorthand'" (of Japanese for wily, or black for evil, and so on).

Blanchard said, "One of the things I hate about political correctness is that it has the effect of trying to sanitize the past." For example, in THE GREAT WHITE HOPE, they edited out the word "n----" for broadcast TV, which made it totally inaccurate. He said that political correctness has a tendency to substitute politeness for precision and accuracy in speech.

Buchanan told about an author who submitted a book in which a Los Angeles policeman refers to a gay man as a "fruit." Even though she admitted that was undoubtedly accurate, she felt that she didn't want the hero saying that and asked to have it changed.

Heck felt that "self-censorship" may teach you that you can get a lot of mileage out of a small amount. Buchanan noted that for "Hill Street Blues," Steve Boccho invented "alternate perjoratives."

Someone in the audience noted that science fiction used to appeal primarily to adolescent boys; was science fiction pushing the adolescent crowd away because of political correctness and the lack of no

form-fitting space suits? Heck pointed out that Drake, Anthony, Stirling, Pournelle et al are still writing. The conversation drifted to Heinlein, leading Eisen to please, "Let's not get started on Heinlein's women." Buchanan said that the nature of the sweaty adolescents has changed, causing Blanchard to respond, "They have TV." Eisen added, "They don't read." Buchanan summed it up by saying that the core audience for science fiction is an older audience (though this is not true for fantasy).

Blanchard pointed out that "science fiction has been with the curve" of society and the military--it doesn't lead it, but it doesn't trail it either.

Heck said that "Political correctness is very often a code phrase used by people to the right of the political spectrum to designate those liberals on the left taking over the world." From the audience, Connie Hirsch said that she was first introduced to the term "PC" in the context of "you're taking it too far."

Someone in the audience suggested that the idea of word choice is the same as writers have been going through with science et al, but Buchanan noted that it is not a matter of "offending" in the hard sciences, but of avoiding nit-pickers. Blanchard agreed, saying, "Political correctness as reflected in any business is purely a factor of market pressures," and you can get away with a lot more in a science fiction book than in a political speech.

Heck pointed out, "Art is a matter of making choices in any case" and observed that his mysteries are on the cozy side: no excessive violence, overt sex, or strong language. He can't change in midstream, because then his audience won't trust him.

Buchanan said that now you can once again have villains who are black, but the latest issue is lookism and weighism. She did agree with what Blanchard said earlier, that all this has forced writers to be less lazy. For example, one submission for the "Young Jedi" series had comic relief of a "fat kid," but that was too easy, and the author was asked to rewrite this.

I asked further for examples of black villains, not being able to recall any. Buchanan said that Steve Perry has had some black villains, and Heck said he has unsympathetic black characters, but it was conceded that this still was rare.

Commenting again on the shift to lookism, Blanchard talked about the movie LIVING IN OBLIVION, where a dwarf hired for a dream sequence in a movie finally gets fed up with the pretentious of the filmmaker and asks, "Why does every dream sequence have to have a dwarf in it?"

(Of course, in the midst of all this discussion of political correctness, I noticed that Buchanan still used the phrase "a gentleman's C" when referring to her grade in French.)

Origami

Sat 12N
Mark R. Leeper

I didn't attend this, but I hear it was well attended. This year in honor of the twentieth anniversary of STAR WARS, Mark taught how to fold an X-Wing fighter.

Reviewing as Hazardous Duty

Sat 1:00 PM
Don D'Ammassa, Thomas A. Easton, Janice M. Eisen, Joe Mayhew (m), Don Sakers

Description: "It seems so easy: Make big bucks telling people what you liked reading and what you didn't like. Is it that way, really? What are the hazards of reviewing? What is the impact on your reading schedule? Do you have time to read 'just for fun' anymore? Do your reviews sometimes cost you friendships, or at least a few difficult moments when you run into the author of a less-than-perfect novel. Do you find yourself slanting a review or not reviewing a particular book just to avoid that? Is it easy to write negative reviews? Does it bother you to see your opinions in print, especially ten years later? Do the hordes of groupies following you around interfere with your privacy?"

Mayhew asked, "Science is a conversation at its most elegant about ideas; science fiction is the bull session. [So] what is reviewing?" He also asked whether there was a hazardous element to reviewing, which is more what the panelists addressed.

Easton said he had received letters from Robert Adams saying he would tar and feather Easton and Stanley Schmidt for a review Easton had written for ANALOG, but it never happened. D'Ammassa said he had had complaints, but not to that extent, and that he saw more adverse reaction to good reviews, observing they were not good enough, than to bad ones. One drunken author did call his wife at 1AM and harangue her for forty-five minutes, though.

Eisen said she had received an ad hominem nasty letter from an editor once, but not from the author. She does have a problem, however, reviewing friends' books. Sakers said he worried about a negative review he gave an L. Ron Hubbard book, but there was no reaction. Easton said that magazines have heard back from Scientologists, however.

Mayhew asked, "Has anyone in the audience ever cared about a review they have read and disagreed with?" There was no response, but then again, we're not the authors.

Mayhew said he worried more about a loss of focus, or of seeming to be negative on the author rather than the work, or of being remembered for one bad point instead of positive comments.

D'Ammassa said he has been told that opinions have no place in his reviews. (Actually, I've seen similar statements on Usenet.)

Mayhew observed that he has to steal time to read what he wants to read, so it affects the pleasure of reading. Easton said that he has too long a lead time to worry about waiting two years to read what he wants when he wants to read it. Given that just about anything he reviews will be several months old by the time the review appears, he reads what he wants. Eisen said that at one point she got burned out, and couldn't read science fiction any more. And Sakers said he reads differently for reviewing than for pleasure.

Most reviewers pick what they want to review, though Sakers is assigned some. Mayhew said that though a reviewer can choose what to read, s/he needs to keep audience in mind (e.g., compare Robinson's "Mars" books to Michener rather than Heinlein for a mainstream audience). Some publications have a definite slant. THE WASHINGTON POST, for example, wants "better" (more literary) books, while ABSOLUTE MAGNITUDE wants science/space adventure. Easton reviews for ANALOG, which he describes as having "readers with rivets." D'Ammassa said that SF CHRONICLE has no specific personality of reader, except that s/he is familiar with the field. Sakers said that his journal, WAVELENGTHS, is focused on lesbigay issues, but that he tries to focus as much on the science fiction as on the lesbigay content. The panelists agreed that all this means that reviews can't be translated for another audience.

As far as general rules about reviewing, Mayhew said that he tries to figure out who the writer was trying to talk to, and whether he did that. Eisen said it isn't her place as a reviewer to decide that the plot outweighs the characters or vice versa, but she can say what is strong and what is weak. She also said that if what the author is trying to accomplish doesn't speak to you, then don't try to review it. (I

would modify this to say to review it *if* you like it in spite of general disinterest in its category.)

Easton said that he found it interesting when the packaging and the reality of the book conflict. Mayhew suggested MIDSHIPMAN'S HOPE by David Feintuch; I think a good example is the first paperback printing of Connie Willis's DOOMSDAY BOOK. Eisen thought this was also true of most of R. A. Melluch's books, but she said that in general she still has to go by package because she has no time to do otherwise.

Easton said that reviewers should force themselves to branch out. Mayhew warned against reviewing as autobiography (i.e., talking about yourself instead of the book).

Mayhew asked the panelists how they review collections and anthologies. They agreed it was easier it they had no word limit. Eisen said she tried to pick out the best stories and say why they were the best. Mayhew asked if one has to read all the stories; some said yes, some no.

I had to leave early to prepare for my panel; when I left they were discussing the politically oriented novel (by people like Pat Robertson, Newt Gingrich, and LeVar Burton).

(There is also the idea as a review as just an announcement: for example, there's a Bishop collection that you won't see unless you look for it. In fact, Dan Kimmel mentioned that one of my reviews written with this idea in mind pointed him to the perfect gift for a lesbian friend of his who was becoming bat mitzvah: THE DYKE AND THE DYBBUK by Ellen Galford.)

Where History Went Wrong

Sat 2:00 PM
Esther M. Friesner, Mark Keller, Evelyn C. Leeper (m), Mark L. Olson

Description: "Where did history go wrong? Are we living in a really improbable alternate history which would never pass muster as plausible except we're so used to it? How could the Roman Empire have collapsed? How could the Greeks have avoided developing a real science? How could the Chinese have stayed nearly static for 30000 years? Defend the thesis that we're really a bad SF manuscript which is about to get bounced."

[Thanks to Mark for taking notes for me at this panel.]

Leeper began by saying that this was not supposed to be one of those "Well, of course things would be better in an alternate world, so we should have had one" sort of panels, but more of a question where history logically should have turned out differently.

Friesner introduced herself by saying, "I have done bad things to history." Her latest "fix-up" (as she described it) is CHILD OF THE EAGLE, in which Venus comes down and convinces Brutus to save Caesar. As Leeper noted, "Don't let the concept turn you off." Olson said he was a longtime fan who came to history by the back door from reading such alternate histories as LEST DARKNESS FALL and wondering about the real history. Keller said he started in biology, then spread out, and was eventually told that in his writing of speculations which were really alternate history that he was writing science fiction.

Leeper said she was a long time alternate history fan, having even read some alternate history romances. Keller noted that time travel romances are the second biggest romance category, but there are even romance alternate histories that are *not* time travel stories.

Friesner mentioned her alternate history with Jane Austen in love with Davy Crockett ("Jane's Fighting Ships"), though Keller thought Austen and Walt Whitman would be more interesting.

(Perhaps he was thinking of Paul Di Filippo's "Walt and Emily.") There is also an alternate history with the characters of Austen's PRIDE AND PREJUDICE (S. N. Dyer's "Resolve and Resistance"). Friesner said that someone said that no one could do a bug-eyed monster story in Austen's style, but that was a dangerous thing to say around her.

There were a few bizarre suggestions of alternate histories which were not really more likely than our own. Olson finally noted that people are asking for too much when they say, "Well, what if A were different and independently B were different and so on."

This led to the question of what was meant by "improbable" and the distinction between "Implausible" and "improbable." Leeper noted that it's easy to say that what happened is improbable, but it may be true that everything else is even more improbable. (If you roll a die, any given number is improbable--but still *something* has to come up.)

Leeper noted that as you get further from a change point, things will diverge. The problem is that a reasonable alternate history will soon be unrecognizable. (That is to some extent the problem with Robert Silverberg's recent "Via Roma"--it's so "accurate" in terms of divergence that it might as well be set on an alien world.)

Someone in the audience returned to the idea of framing this in the notion of probable or improbable, not possible or impossible. Keller said how to look at this was all tied up in how we perceive the present, and the (possible) future. Medieval Europe had no idea of a monster plague being on the way; they were building cathedrals. Leeper asked, "So when an author turned up with a science fiction novel predicting or postulating a great plague, was he turned away?" The answer is, quite probably.

Leeper said as far as unlikely/improbable events that have shaped our present, two were the asteroid impact that killed the dinosaurs, and the kamikaze wind that saved Japan from a Chinese invasion. Friesner added, "I have a story in DINOSAUR FANTASTIC on what really killed the dinosaurs."

Robert Sacks in the audience suggested the assassination of Lincoln as unlikely. Without this, he postulated, there would have been no violent Reconstruction, and America would not have been traumatized. Keller said it was difficult to imagine a post-1865 with Lincoln and no violent reaction, but Olson agreed that a gentle approach would have made a difference. Keller compared Reconstruction to the post-World War II world, in which the Allies decided to flatten their enemies and restart everything. Olson commented that the question of a post-Civil War with Lincoln has been addressed in alternate histories.

Leeper asked similarly, what if Kennedy had not been shot? Olson said that Lincoln was great, but Kennedy was lucky. Someone in the audience suggested that the Vietnam War wouldn't have happened, overlooking that Kennedy was the one who got us into it. As Olson pointed out, Johnson thought the war a mistake but could not stop it.

Returning to the distinction between plausible and probable, someone in the audience noted that most would have thought Reagan not survive his assassination attempts. Keller said that it makes a difference if you get shot you have a chance for excellent medical care. The whole cycle of Presidents elected in years divisible by twenty dying in office was broken when Reagan survived, but most agree that his wounds would have been fatal forty years earlier, and possibly even twenty.

Keller noted that changes that changed everything include changes in warfare. Wars used to consist of massed changes on the battlefield, and it was only with World War I that generals finally figured out that this didn't work, though certainly it stopped working effectively before then. All this was due to several trends happening at same time--trends in transportation, communication, weaponry, etc. Someone thought it improbable that this development did not happen earlier, but Keller pointed out

that there was a feedback system here. "We call the many things [happening at once] the Industrial Revolution (or perhaps the "birth of the modern"). Leeper, however, thought that the joining of trends to peak at one time is improbable, and we can't say this will last through the ages.

The panelists did, however, agree that people don't recognize trends, revolutions, or greatness when it's happening. During the Industrial Revolution, no one called it that. When Melville was writing, no one thought he was great.

Someone said that there was a "convergence" in 1830, and there is a good argument we are at a convergence now. If we remove one factor, how will that change things? Friesner pointed out that everything makes sense in hindsight, but no one can predict. She told the story of someone who wrote a play in which a doctor delivers a child on a rainy night and says triumphantly, "This child will grow up to be the great Louis Pasteur!"

Regarding improbability, Leeper noted that someone once said, "Truth is stranger than fiction because fiction has to make sense."

Another aspect is that we like to think we're unusual (hence improbable). We like alternate histories in which someone talks about how we're one of the few timelines that have discovered atomic energy, or democracy, or whatever. But we tend not to like the ones that say we're unique in having the Holocaust, or smallpox, or something equally negative. Or, as Keller suggested, the ones in which someone says, "Oh, so you guys

Someone in the audience suggested that the speed of changes is connected to speed of information transportation, Keller said that it was still too soon to tell, particularly in terms of how the Internet would affect things. For example, someone noted that when it was instituted, no one knew that the Pony Express was not a big change, or that it would be knocked out by the telegraph.

Keller also commented that two of the greatest effects of the connection to the New World are also rarely considered: plague and the importation of the sweet potato to China as a major food crop.

From the audience, Roy Krupp asked how we would look for evidence of tampering in our timeline. Olson pointed out that if you change the past you will change it to the point where you cannot discover time travel, and then it stabilizes.

Someone in the audience said that we cannot leave concluding aliens are modifying history, and Keller noted that this is really secret history rather than alternate history.

Boskone 34 February 16, 1997 Page 17

Someone in the audience claimed that we don't really know what happened in history, e.g., that we don't know that the Punic Wars ended the way we thought they did. The panelists strongly disagreed. Keller said that we can see the ruins of Carthage and from coins know when it was destroyed; Olson said there was also physical evidence to verify the breadth of the Carthaginian Empire. Leeper said that while some things are indeterminate, the major flow of history can be determined.

Someone asked if it was unlikely that the Greeks didn't develop a more substantial technology base. Keller said that arithmetically they did not do algebra so well, although Archimedes could have developed calculus. Olson also pointed that the Greek mindset did not value experimental science, or feel the need to economize in its use of labor.

Summarizing this rather rambling hour, Keller said that in five hundred years texts will say that these were the "Good Old Days." Olson said that if this were a manuscript, "I think the plot outline would be sent back by the editor, because there are long dull sections." Friesner reiterated that history is

very dependent on weather, and that we will go back to being tribal: "Get in the way and we will reduce you to sticks." Leeper pointed out that when you get right down to it, the universe itself is improbable.

The Future of SF Fandom and Conventions

Sat 3:00PM
Gay Haldeman, Rusty Hevelin, Joe Siclari, Suzanne Tompkins (m), Tom Whitmore

Description: "Over the past 60 years, fandom has grown from a few hundred boys writing letters to prozines and publishing a few fanzines, to tens of thousands of people of all ages all over the world who participate directly in fannish activities and tens of millions of people who read SF or watch it on TV. Conventions have become enormous and frequently try to be all things to all people. What will happen in the next 60 years? Is fandom doomed by its own success to change into something unrecognizable. Has the last fan already been born who, 70 years from now will write the last letter to the last fanzine? Or will fandom continue to evolve more or less smoothly, changing into something new, but retaining connections to its roots in the 30s? What do you think? Into what is Homo fannus evolving? Can these trends be stopped or changed? How? Should we try? Can fandom survive SF becoming part of the world's popular culture?"

There was mention of a Web site of fan history (http://fanac.org).

As we celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the first Worldcon (1937, with under a dozen people-- though this is arguable), people talked about trends. Whitmore said he looked at convention size and saw sudden ratcheting in Worldcon size rather than steady, gradual growth. He also saw the growth of the smaller convention (defined as fewer than two hundred people).

Siclari said that fandom used to be done through the mail (which was faster then), but that the communications of fandom have been changing. Now there are more giant conventions like DragonCon. Haldeman said that she hoped that's not the future of conventions, because her experience was that no one at DragonCon was interested in the readers and the writers, just in the media and the games. She observed that one reason (perhaps the main reason) that conventions have gotten so large because travel is easier. Hevelin said that commercial conventions are the biggest, but that they are not really science fiction conventions.

Tompkins suggested part of what may be generating small conventions are bad experiences with big ones. For example, she said that NorWesCon had a "disaster" convention, and had to get out of town. (Sounds like the "Boskone from Hell," right?) But she said also that people want smaller conventions where they can find people. And a third reason is that large cons are splitting into smaller groups, partly because of price (big conventions need big facilities).

Whitmore concurred, saying that the budget for ConFrancisco was $750K, while the year before for Magicon it was $550K. He claimed that successful large conventions have smaller conventions within them (a function of Tompkinss second reason, perhaps?).

At this point I asked for some definitions and the panelists agreed that "small" meant under five hundred, large was more than two thousand, and medium was in between.

Whitmore said that big conventions will continue, to which Haldeman added, "But smaller ones will proliferate as well."

Siclari said that there is a difference between conventions and where fandom is going. The media aspect is getting so big that it will soon split off by itself, according to him. Whitmore said that it's more than "media": it's also comics, costuming, collectible card games, "Star Trek," "Star Wars," etc.

("Star Trek" and "Star Wars" are cross-media fandoms.)

Whitmore thinks that we are not growing, but declining. On the other hand, Net fans may have more idea that fandom is participatory and swell the numbers.

Haldeman said that her experience is that the influence of American conventions is spreading to other countries, and conventions there are losing some of their distinctive national/regional character.

Siclari said that a lot of the growth of Worldcons was related to outside sources. STAR TREK hit the scene right before the 1967 Worldcon, STAR WARS before the 1978 Worldcon, and THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK and RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK before the 1984 Worldcon, and those are precisely the ones that Whitmore cited as showing jumps in memberships. Siclari said that Worldcons still try to be all things to all people, but most other conventions can't do this any more. He disputed part of what Haldeman said, saying that there is not much cross-culturalization with Japanese fandom, except for a small bit on the West Coast. (Someone asked about a Cancun bid for Worldcon, which Siclari said is a serious bid, but not an American one. I'm not quite sure what was meant by this.)

Siclari pointed out that the dominant topic on television today is SF (speculative fiction in the sense of including fantasy and horror as well). Or as Priscilla Olson said, "The mainstream are us." Someone reported that an ad for BABYLON 5 in a mainstream publication had the words "BABYLON 5-- winner of the Hugo Award" in it. (I believe that the Mark Protection Committee is looking into the fact that the words "Hugo Award" were not properly marked as service marks. Of course, I haven't marker it either.) Someone else said, "We've arrived," to which one response was, "Oh, shit!"

Hevelin said that Nature tries everything, so we don't know what direction fannish evolution will take. Someone in the audience said that it seems as though more teenagers are reading because of more complex science fiction on television. Hevelin said he was seeing more cleavages between fanzine and convention fandom, and between readers and media fans. Priscilla Olson said that new fans seem to want a convention where they are catered to. Siclari said that the problem is that if fandom is supposed to provide a sense of community, the optimum number is only a couple of hundred people.

Talking about the fisioning of conventions, Whitmore said that Arisia was a Boskone spin-off, but that he felt Readercon was not.

Someone in the audience said when he first asked someone else about science fiction conventions he was told they are "where we meet our friends" and as a result they didn't sound very welcoming.

Whitmore closed by saying, "We shouldn't consider [commercial media cons] a threat, but they consider us one." And all the panelists agreed that you should support what you enjoy doing.

The Future of E-Mail

Sat 8:00PM
Daniel P. Dern (m), Daniel Hatch, Saul Jaffe, Evelyn C. Leeper, Don Sakers

Description: "Email is barely 20 years old, and has only hit the big time in the last five years. But it's time to take stock of where it may be going. If projections are to be believed, the number of people on email will continue to grow exponentially. What 'must' change for email to survive? What changes are likely? What changes would be desirable? Given your use of email, what would you like to see changed? Go out on a limb and make some predictions about what email will be like in 2007. And 'then' tell how this will affect society!"

[Thanks to Mark for taking notes for me at this panel.]

Dern began by pointing out that email is older than twenty years. Leeper noted that this was true, but that lately her mail had gone up exponentially, and a much higher percentage of her mail is spam. Someone in the audience asked about this. The problem is that the sender incurs no cost, so there's nothing to stop people from sending junk mail to thousands of addresses. This is one of the things that "must" change for email to survive. (One possibility is that companies will start blocking mail from some sites.)

Jaffe said that he was getting some amount, but wouldn't say how much. He does go through 8000 messages a day for the SF-Lovers Digest. There was some discussion of mail filters, but someone said that more and more people are going private because of the spam. This led to so much discussion that Dern declared a half-hour moratorium on discussion of spamming.

There was a debate about allowing job applications, etc., via email. What about people who don't have email access?

Leeper mentioned another problem: attachments (such as Microsoft Word) clogging up disk space.

Jaffe said external events affect email. For example, the SF-Lovers mailing list experienced a spike at the time of THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK and again at THE RETURN OF THE JEDI.

Jaffe felt that the "education of the masses" will help, but also that some smarts would be built into some of the software. Sakers said there were three things on his shopping list about email. One is that people would have one email address that didn't change. (Of course, we don't have that for telephones or addresses now.) This raised the issue of providing email access for everyone. Jaffe said that the "Freenet" project is addressing this.

Leeper said that on her wish list was plain ASCII text for mail; she wants just the information she needs. Jaffe thought that this fascination with varieties of attachments is like the fascination with fonts when PCs first became widespread.

Someone claimed that with email, the art of letter-writing has been restored. Sakers agreed and Dern said that we are all turning into columnists. Jaffe said that people were confusing the art of letter writing with literacy. Leeper noted that some people are better in email form than on paper, and some cannot spell to save their lives. Then again there are the people who think that spelling is unimportant.

Dern said he wished for a program that says your message is hooey.

Jaffe addressed the issue of verification, saying that while PGP proves that the mail is from who it says it is from, people receiving mail to know that the purported sender uses PGP. Only if PGP is made universal will it be really useful.

Someone said that email is a real advantage for business (and literary) collaboration, but what changes to society will come about? Jaffe said that already television ratings are declining as people discover email (and probably more importantly, the Web). Sakers said that fandom really created the equivalent of email in APAs, and that they were quick to jump on the email bandwagon. (So why the resistance to on-line fanzines?)

People mentioned the use of email for emergency communications (faster than paper, and to more people simultaneously than the telephone). Dern said that it will be a really convenient way to meet people, and particularly people who cannot get out will use it.

Leeper said, "I think some of the structure will change, but email is here to stay: it makes everything a whole lot easier." Jaffe said that three years from now technology will have changed so much we will not recognize it. And Sakers summed it all up by pronouncing, "Email has a bright future."

There were a couple of problems with this panel. Dern tended to let audience dominate the discussion, but even worse, people who did not shout out their comments were shut out of the conversation.

Crossover Novels

Sun 10:00AM
Glen Cook, Rosemary Edghill, Laura Anne Gilman, Peter J. Heck (m)

Description: "Science fiction is what we're all about, right? What about Mystery? Romance? YA? What demands do these place on the writer, and how are those demands similar/different? Which genre is the most enjoyable to work in? Does mix-and-match make a better story? Is it more fun to crossover, or stay on just one side of the playground?"

Gilman said she doesn't believe there is a cross-over novel in science fiction, because science fiction is the setting while mystery (for example) is what goes on in the novel. She thinks that you can have a romance novel that crosses over into science fiction, but not vice versa. (This seems logically impossible--isn't crossover symmetric?)

Heck said that some of the most common crossovers are mysteries are set in ancient Rome, or the West, or someplace else exotic. The problem is that bookstores don't know where to file them. He felt that "certain kinds of elements trump all others" in the shelving battle; for example, romance trumps science fiction, but science fiction trumps mystery. Best-sellers are their own category (e.g., Stephen King). (Given that bookstores file James Michener's IBERIA in the fiction section instead of travel, I've concluded shelving has little to do with the actual book.)

Edghill said that Regency romances are a small sub-category of romances with very many words and no sex, but really are a distinct genre.

Heck said that Tom Dougherty of Tor researched why people buy what they do, and the primary reasons were the author's reputation, word of mouth, and the cover.

Gilman said, "SF serial killer books are a lot of fun," but if you change genres or style, your audience may feel betrayed, or just not be interested. Edghill suggested using a pseudonym when writing out of your usual genre.

Time travel romances are also a popular crossover. The panelists made a distinction between science fiction and cutting edge science (a la Michael Crichton). In general, technology and science fiction movies and television have made science fiction more accessible.

[Again, I had to leave early to prepare for my panel.]

What's My Timeline?

Sun 11:00AM
Mark Keller (m), Evelyn C. Leeper, Mark L. Olson

Description: "If you were dropped into a variant history, could you figure out where the change point was? Prepare an alternate history timeline to stump your fellow panelists (and the audience). Enjoy."

[Thanks to Mark for taking notes for me at this panel.]

As the last panel was leaving, I overheard Ed Meskys say to his guide dog, "C'mon, Jerry, let's go bite Fred Lerner." I wonder what Lerner did to warrant it.

This was apparently a suggestion from Readercon for a panel/game which they wanted Boskone to play-test for them.

Keller described this as being similar to the predicament faced by the character in Poul Anderson's "Time Patrol" stories. There the approach was to find out what the change point was and try to correct it. Part of what the reader enjoyed was seeing how long it takes them to find out what caused the difference. Sometimes it was not immediately obvious, such as having a Celtic America the result of Carthage winning the Punic Wars. But Anderson sometimes cheats by having some character have a massive historical library, or make some extremely important (but unlikely) comment. ("I know how hard it is to find a room during this celebration of the 400th anniversary of the victory of the Spanish Armada.") In addition, the characters always either spoke some "dead" language that turned out to be the main language in the alternate world, or met someone who conveniently spoke their language, which was now a "dead" language. (Though "dead" is a relative term. If you went back a couple of hundred years and spoke Hebrew people would not say, "Oh, that is a dead language." They would either recognize it as a liturgical language, or not know it at all, Similarly, Latin is not really dead. One of my co-workers told of speaking conversational Latin with an Italian relative of his, that being the only language they had in common.)

Keller asked what the chances are that you would really find a library with all this historical speculation. More likely is the scenario in A GUN FOR DINOSAUR in which a fellow drops into a parallel universe and is enslaved by the Indians, and only discovers years later from a passing Viking that Greek civilization did not discover science. Apparently our time traveler had earlier gone back and tried to show the Greeks what science could give them in terms of weapons, etc. Aristotle saw this and was so scared that he abandoned science and it never developed in Europe.

Leeper said the key was whether you can find a library. For example, in Robert Heinlein's JOB, the characters always look for a library. (In one, they discover by reading the almanacs that someone named Carter had become President,) Wherever they go, there is always a library. And if you want to see examples of how travelers figure out what has changed, she suggested you watch SLIDERS.

Keller was the most prepared for the actual "game": he had brought timelines from various stories. (The other two panelists seemed to have thought more about trying to construct their own.) Keller read a description of what you as a traveler saw, and audience (and other panel) members tried guessing what the change was, and what story it was from.

The first was on the streets of Brooklyn: there's a 1952 calendar, no swastikas, and a guy wearing a brown uniform is being shaved and does not pay. You see a short shrimpy guy in a king's uniform, and a policeman answers your questions in Italian. The answer (somewhat obviously) is that Italy won World War II ("A Passage in Italics" by William Dean) because Fermi stayed in Italy and the Italians got the atomic bomb.

The second one was that you are in Pennsylvania and things have suddenly changed. You are in a forest, and you find a dirt road with wagon ruts, and a guy with a wolf's head. Someone recognized this as LORD KALVAN OF OTHERWHEN by H. Beam Piper. Olson said that this was in part because the language was Indo-European and he made the right guess.

Keller said his last one was based on a world that made the NEW YORK TIMES bestseller list. You are on a rubber raft in the harbor, but all the ships have disappeared, the sky is a lot clearer, and your radio finds nothing, You look at the trees and they are familiar. There are clams on the shore and

oysters, but no birds or insects, and it seems a little cooler. You look around and see leaf litter and some purple worms with feet. You see something that looks like an armored worm, and suddenly three tentacles reach out from under a rock and grab it, Leeper guessed this one: the Cambrian (Burgess Shale) mass extinction (as described in Stephen Jay Gould's WONDERFUL LIFE) did not happen, or happened differently. (Someone said that this reminded him of "The Brooklyn Project" by William Tenn.)

Olson gave one scenario he made up on the spot: you take a time machine back to the post-Roman Empire period in northern Italy. It's still a Roman province, and Rome still is running things but it is a lot poorer, and the Empire has been around for a long time. Everyone speaks Latin. You discover there are a lot of Celts, but not many Germans, in the armies, There are few Jews or Christians, only degenerate forms of the old religions. In Milan you find a synagogue, but Rome does not control Judea. Someone guessed (correctly) that there was no Maccabean Revolt against the Hellenic influence, and no Alexander the Great.

As with any alternate history panel, the audience started throwing out random suggestions. If the 1958 championship football game hadn't been televised, everyone wouldn't have become football fans. (Olson asked, "You mean that one minute change of not televising something would have brought Utopia?") Keller thought there might just be more professional baseball leagues,

A discussion of English history turning points led the panelists to note that Henry II is more pivotal than most people realize. If he had not survived as long as he did, there would have been a real difference in common law and common lawyers, and in the English aristocracy.

Keller gave one last puzzle: You are on a boat on a large river. You pull ashore and go inland, where you notice Scotch pines 150 feet high in rows, like a tree farm. There are faint transmissions on the AM band of your radio. You hear a Strauss waltz and then in German you hear someone say that was by Tchaikovsky. The pronunciation seems more Baltic than Nordic. The ground is lumpy, and you find a brick wall under the ground. You find a beer bottle labeled in Polish and conclude (somehow) that this is where Warsaw used to be. A small guy wearing a kilt runs by and won't stop to talk to you. In the distance you hear the sound of a horn. This last was a giveaway to Leeper that this was THE SOUND OF HIS HORN by Sarban. However, she felt this wasn't as good a puzzle, because you have also moved in time, into the far future, but this wasn't mentioned. Someone suggested that giving an approximate year as part of the puzzle (as Olson did) would solve this.

As far as the game itself, some conclusions and suggestions the panel came to were:

- Let people submit scenarios ahead of time.
- Let people use timelines from novels and stories.
- Tell people when the scenario takes place.
- Set up teams and allow twenty questions from a team to try to determine the change point. (This requires that the submitters be present.) The teams could be from the audience, or the audience versus the panelists. This should, however, be determined before the panel starts.
- Try to keep original timelines to the minimum change needed.
- Make sure people understand just what preparation is needed.

The Craft of Reading

Sun 12N
Don D'Ammassa, Gregory Feeley, Jane Jewell, Jerry Kaufman, Jim Mann (m)

Description: "Everyone talks about the craft of writing, but isn't the craft of reading the other half of it? What good's a well-written book if it's never well-read? What kinds of reader are there? How do they differ? What sorts of things do they look for from writers? Do some specific kinds of readers

predominate in SF? How do you, personally read? Why? Would you like to change it? How? Do you use different styles of reading for different kinds of literature?"

The panelists mentioned David Hartwell's "reading protocols" (without actually naming them) and Kaufman talked about the possibility of an unwritten contract between the reader and the writer with obligations in both directions. Mann said that C. S. Lewis's EXPERIMENT IN CRITICISM analyzes reading rather than writing. Lewis talked about a friend who read adventures, so he recommended Robert Louis Stevenson to him. But his friend said Stevenson was "too wordy" with too much sense of place (though probably not in those words).

Feeley said that John Clute said that genre fiction is "canny," knowing, and crafty in having a sense of the readers' expectations, and both his or her upper and lower limits, thereby making a compact between the author and the reader. The author knows what the reader already knows, and knows how well the reader knows the field, so s/he doesn't spend a lot of time explaining what the reader already knows. He also said that murder mysteries of fifteen years ago couldn't assume the reader had any knowledge of serial killers, while now they are familiar.

Feeley said that in the past, most of what was being read in science fiction was what was published in that particular month (though this is changing because the field is much less magazine-driven).

Kaufman observed that people think of themselves as science fiction readers, not as readers who read science fiction. (I would dispute this for many people, who seem too widely read to fall into this mold.)

Feeley said that there are now so many niches where people can get their fix (that they don't need to be widely read).

D'Ammassa said that you have to tailor your recommendations to your readers. Feeley agreed, saying that just as most people don't say "surprise me, delight me, interest me" in a restaurant but rather they specify what they want, similarly readers know what they want in a book, and they want to know what they're reading when they start.

Someone in the audience asked, "Is a genre maggots in the corpse of genius?" to which Feeley immediately responded, "No!"

Kaufman said that there are different ways of reading different kinds of books; he leaps through mysteries, walks slowly through science fiction, and walks very carefully through non-fiction books. He said that in fact the word density on the page is geared to this as well.

D'Ammassa says that one result of all this is that authors keep delivering the same thing because readers like it. Feeley pointed out that other forms (art, music, etc.) also deliver on expectations. He said that an author has to know what the readers expect before s/he breaks the rules- -carefully. Violating expectations can cause problems: John Dickson Carr letting the murderer in one story go caused an uproar. I pointed out that Doyle seemed to break the rules, but it was noted that he was setting up the genre, so Holmes could be defeated. (One suspects that some of S. M. Stirling's problem is that he breaks the rule of having sympathetic characters.) Sometimes breaking the rules enough means you leave the genre: LONESOME DAVE is not really a Western.

Feeley said that the New Wave was smashing down the rules, while cyberpunk was admitting tropes from other genres (e.g., Raymond Chandler). He said, "There is no science fiction genre any more." Science fiction readers used to read everything in the field. Now the field is so huge that someone can read a lot of some of it and be totally unfamiliar with other parts. He gave the example of Bantam Spectra Special Editions, which had a readership of about 8000; a large proportion of science fiction readers were completely unfamiliar with it.

There was some digression into the price of science fiction books. Feeley said that the base prices were as follows: 1964: $0.40 1967: $0.75 1984: $2.95 1997: $5.99 The current higher prices are because fewer copies are sold of each and because of the rapidly spirally returns problem. People wondered why publishers didn't try to produce only the necessary number of books but Feeley said it was the difference between the mustard connoisseur (who is concerned about quality) and the mustard manufacturer (who wants as much shelf space as possible).

Feeley thought that all genres are getting older and more familiar, and we demand more of a book (it's more narrowly defined, according to Mann). There was a big shake-up when people went from magazines to books, and he sees another one coming soon. Mann suggested that some genres may move to trade paperbacks (instead of mass market paperbacks). Mark Keller (in the audience) said that he was starting to see subscription publications (e.g., the new Jacqueline Lichtenberg) in the manner of the nineteenth century. Feeley said that Tor is doing a lot more in trade paperback.

The Use and Abuse of Statistics

Sun 1:00PM
Michael F. Flynn

Description: "78% of the US public will believe any statistic you throw at them. How can statistics be used to buffalo people? What are the techniques? Who uses them? How effective are they?"

Who would have thought a talk on statistics would have drawn twenty people at a science fiction convention?

I missed the very beginning of this, having some problem in finding the room. Flynn was saying that he had once seen three probability distributions that looked entirely different from each other, but all had the same average (mean), the same standard distribution, etc.

He then demonstrated the importance of collecting data, even when you're sure you know the information. He showed the audience fifteen different images of the American "penny," with Lincoln facing variously left or right, the date in various places, different words, etc., and asked the audience to pick the correct one. Of the ten people who picked, two picked that one (about the usual percentage). Six picked none; a couple were exempted because they were not from the United States. (Boskone may be the only United States convention with a fair number of European fans.)

The word "statistics" is from "statistos," meaning referring to the state. Even now, the major source of statistics seems to be the "Statistical Abstracts" published by the Federal government. These are what Flynn used to demonstrate his points.

For example, most people "know" that women entered the workforce in large numbers during World War II, but the statistics show that the percentage of women in workforce rose steadily from the turn of the century to the present, with "Rosie the Riveter" a blip that didn't have a lasting effect.

The same is true of foreign car imports. They didn't suddenly appear during the gas crisis, but have been steadily getting a larger and larger share of the market. (As someone whose family had a Volkswagen in 1959, this isn't a major surprise.)

"Have we taken this as far as we can?" Flynn asked, and answered himself, "No, let's take this too far." The graphs for women in the workforce and foreign cars imports match, so one might be tempted to say that more women in the workforce caused the rise in foreign car imports, or vice versa. But correlation does not imply cause. For example, Flynn said, both his waistline and size of the universe are increasing. But if he goes on a diet, that won't shrink the universe (though he admits that he hasn't it tried yet).

Other statistics: Canada gets the plurality of our exports (21%), Japan is second (12%), Mexico third (7%), and the United Kingdom fourth (6%). So why do we complain that Japan is a closed market and not that the United Kingdom is?

Looked at another way, we export $49 million of goods to Japan, while we import $90 million. A trade imbalance? Yes, but we have 260,000,000 people, while Japan has only 123,000,000. So the imports per capita are just about the same.

We did some sampling with a bead box, and the small sample space plus random chance gave us results that could be attributed to the gender of the sampler, or the distance from the electrical outlet in the wall, or any number of other things that had no bearing on it at all. Flynn said that once you collect the data and find the defects, you can find *some* explanation. But in fact unlikely things will happen, and variation is everywhere. "Variation is the enemy. Death to variation!"

For example, if you are rolling a pair of dice and have to file a "defect" report every time you roll a twelve, what then? You will eventually roll a twelve. Asked to analyze the cause, you may decide it was because you threw too hard. So you throw easier, but eventually you will roll another twelve. Now you standardize the angle. What happens the next time you roll a twelve? According to Flynn "You write "11" on the production report form." The twelve is not due to any particular cause, but random chance. However, random variation tends to stay within bounds (the bell curve). If you have tug-of-war that is evenly balanced, the teams will move back and forth at random. But if Arnold Schwarzenegger joins a tug- of-war, that becomes *assignable* variation.

When a graph shows a marked jump, there is probably assignable variation. A graph of business failures shows that the *system* of how business failed changed in 1930, because there is a huge "step" at that point. On the other hand, unemployment rates were pretty steady except for 1893, 1929, World War I, and World War II, all of which constitute assignable variations.

Again, what we know is often wrong. The baby boom actually started which made the resumption of the trend seem like the real boom.

How you get the data will determine the data you get. Flynn described what someone called "push polls" which phrase their questions in a way that they get the data they want. (For example, "Do you think that the United States should continue to be the world leader by maintaining its armed forces at an effective level?") Or you can adjust the results by adjusting the definitions: the percentage of people living in poverty depends in large part on your definition of income (e.g., does it include food stamps, welfare, etc.?) A third technique is to select your sample space. One example he gave was a poll about global warning sent to scientists who were members of an environmental group. Most didn't return the poll; a minority of those who did felt that global warning was something that warranted study. The headlines from this? "Scientists Warn of Global Warming"!

Due a scheduling mix-up, this panel was given only thirty minutes, but Darrell Schweitzer graciously offered to move the following event (his reading, I believe) into the anteroom.

FanHistory on the Internet

Sun 3:00pm
Rob Hansen, Evelyn C. Leeper (m), Patrick Nielsen Hayden, Ben Yalow

Description: "What's there? Is it rec.arts.sf.fandom.gibberish? Who writes material worth saving on the nets? Where is it saved? Is there good OLD stuff on the net as well?"

[Thanks to Mark for taking notes for me at this panel.]

During the introductions, Nielsen Hayden said he was known for his trademark bow ties (actually Yalow's trademark), and Yalow observed that (because the panel was being taped) this is now recorded fan history, even though it's completely in error. Leeper commented that a lot of history seemed to wallow in wrong facts.

Nielsen Hayden said that most of fan history is the preservation of anecdotes rather than real history, and that someone has to get down what we know. Yalow said that there were the Warner volumes, but that in them Warner basically wrote himself out of fan history. And these are also not entirely accurate, at least according to other people who were there.

Farber observed that most histories are no more reliable than talking to someone who was there. Leeper added that she and Mark Leeper can walk out from a panel and have different ideas what was said--and this is immediately afterwards, never mind after several months or years.

Yalow said that this goes back to what history is: we have the Net of a Thousand Lies, but history is Books of a Hundred Lies. Nielsen Hayden noted this is exacerbated by the fact that we like funny stories about our friends. Hansen thought that while people's memories were untrustworthy, at least fanzines get the dates right, but Farber disagreed, saying that some dont properly date their stories, and Yalow said that even the fanzine writers don't remember dates properly.

Yalow thought that when writing for the Net, people are prone to errors, and that people tend to believe what they see on the Internet (which only results in the perpetuation of bad information). Nielsen Hayden agreed, saying people are more likely to remember what is read that what actually happened.

Jaffe said he used to do an April Fool's issue each year, but people would come up to him months (or years) later and ask him about the items in a way that indicated they believed them, so he stopped.

Yalow said that currently we write it up the history once and preserve it. With the Web we can write it once, and then update it. Farber said the problem was too much data and too many views, and also that the more we put into fan history on the web the harder it becomes to find.

Nielsen Hayden said that he didn't want to talk about search engines; five years from now we will look back and say we were thinking search engines, and we didn't think about globbledegooks. Something to remember is that you don't get a nailed-down version of history: history is stories. Part of what helps us is that we are a young enough field and many of the people around know the people who were here at the beginning.

Yalow said that when they were working on Noreascon 3 they were thinking of free memberships for First Fandom. Then they spent hours and hours working on wording. Eventually, they phrased it as "anyone who attended or would have attended the 1939 Worldcon."

There was more detailed discussions, including references to various fan feuds. This led Leeper to ask who we are doing fan history for, and in particular what was the reference to the 1964 Pacificon about. Yalow said that someone was banned from the convention. A similar case was settled in court about two years ago, so fan history also deals with things happening right now.

Leeper noted that by putting it on the Net people have the option of picking it up that they wouldn't have with fanzines. Also, a book you could do a second edition of, but on the Net it is definitely a living document. Yalow added that books along this line are expensive and usually money- losers.

Farber thought that the people who want fan history want something that will last (rather than, I suppose, often evanescent Web pages). Yalow said that these books are done because people think they are worthwhile, somewhat independent of commercial considerations.

Nielsen Hayden said that he would like to see a system with web-based conferencing, but also that he would like to see a useful conferencing system without his having to get endless volumes of Moosejaw history that he wasn't interested in. Nielsen Hayden said he is a believer in asynchronous conferencing, and that Usenet is not as reliable as asynchronous conferencing. Yalow thought that this was one of the advantages of a mailing list; it's not great, but better than what we have now. When we talk about enough money, we are talking about having a web site, which is actually pretty cheap.

Yalow said that the listserv engine now has an index feature and a Web-based search engine, so that historians can ask for (for example) all the postings that talk about Pacificon. However, someone noted that he had tried doing searching and it requires perfect spelling in the source documents; fuzzy logic doesn't do it.

Hansen said that using the Web works for the short term, but gradually more and more broken links turn up. Yes, there is software to check this, but that doesn't solve the problem of what to do if the information at the other end just goes away. Of course, if the material is changing you may want to get rid of old links. Still, it's a bit uncertain. Yalow said that if the primary site is under your control, a lot is easier, implying that you want to retain copies of all the basic material. (Who is the "you" here, one wonders?)

Hansen said that what is needed is more of what evokes a time and place, Yalow thought another easier place to start is to take the newszines and make those available. Hansen thought that the first things that need to go up are references. Nielsen Hayden said history is interesting and there are people who should be looked at; if he had a clone of himself I would write a biography of Terry Carr. (Farber said that with a mere $12,000 contract, he would take the job.)

Hansen reminded the audience that there is more to all this than just scanning stuff in. There is a requirement for imaginative uses. Also, the fact is that the people writing are doing the bits they are interested in. Leeper agreed, saying if people doing something they are not being paid for, they will do it their way. Nielsen Hayden thought we could get a list of the people for whom biographies were wanted and tell them to write one or someone else would write it. ("One of the best way to find the truth is post a lie." But Yalow said this often just gets another lie. If you say Shakespeare's plays were done by Chuck Berry, someone will say, "No, they were written by Homer.")

Miscellaneous

Boskone 35 will be held at the Sheraton Tara in Framingham February 13-15, 1998. The Guest of Honor is Walter Jon Williams; the Official Artist is Omar Rayyan.

The Good, the Bad, and the Okay

Notes by Mark R. Leeper - Copyright 1997 Mark R. Leeper

I took a quick look through my collection to find what science fiction films were based on works of literature. Some, of course are based more accurately than others. I subjectively categorized the films into the three categories. Please recognize that since these are films that I have bothered to keep, the list will be skewed to the positive side. But at least the list offers some basis for discussion. --Mark Leeper

Good Films:

- Andromeda Strain
- Bladerunner

- Carrie
- Colossus
- The Day the Earth Stood Still
- The Fly (1958)
- Gojira
- Invasion of the Body Snatchers (both)
- Journey to the Center of the Earth
- The Last Man on Earth
- Lifeforce (okay, in my opinion)
- The Lost World (1925)
- 1984 (1984)
- No Highway in the Sky
- Quest For Love
- The Thing (1951)
- Things to Come
- Time After Time
- The Time Machine
- 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea
- The Ugly Little Boy
- Village of the Damned
- The War of the Worlds
- Who?

Mediocre Films:

- The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms
- Body Snatchers
- Charly
- Dr. Cyclops
- Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (most versions)
- Fantastic Planet
- First Men in the Moon
- First Spaceship on Venus
- The Fly (1986)
- Frankenstein (most versions)
- The Invisible Man
- It Came From Outer Space
- The Man Who Fell to Earth
- Mysterious Island (1961)
- On the Comet
- The Planet of the Apes
- The Satan Bug
- The Thing (1982)
- This Island Earth
- The 27th Day
- When Worlds Collide

Bad Films:

- The Conquest of Space
- Donovan's Brain
- From Beyond
- The Lost World (1960)
- The Lost World (1992)
- Mysterious Island (1929)

- 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea (1916)

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

| Return to Index | Other Conventions | FANAC Homepage |