

Boskone 38

A convention report by Evelyn C. Leeper
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[This report is appallingly late since two weeks after Boskone we left for a three-week trip to Vietnam. This was written some before the trip, a fair amount on that trip--the twenty-four or so hours flying to get there and a twelve-hour bus ride from Nha Trang to Hoi An--and some after we got back and recovered from the colds we caught on the flight back from Singapore. Copies of my trip log are available at my web site, <http://www.geocities.com/evelynleeper/vietnam.htm>, or by asking me.]

Boskone 38 was held from February 16-18, 2001, in Framingham. The weather was better than last year (it would have to be), but it still took six hours to get there. When Boskone moves back to Boston in 2003, we will definitely have to revisit the feasibility of going, given that that will be an extra hour above Framingham. The train doesn't actually seem any faster than driving.

Unbreakable Chicken in Love: The Offbeat Best Movies of an Offbeat Year **Friday 9:00PM** **MaryAnn Johanson, Daniel Kimmel (m), Mark R. Leeper, Steven Sawicki**

Description: "The year 2000 did not shower Hollywood with glory, and the genre offerings were some of the worst in a long time. An appealingly offbeat year in genre films, or just off? Join our panel in picking through the rubble for what was worth seeing and what might have eluded your attention. (But how could a year which produced *Chicken Run* and --George Lucas in Love' be all bad?)"

Although Mark had specifically requested he not be put on any Friday night panels, Luck of Leeper said that his would be one of the half dozen participant forms misplaced so that information disappeared. We did manage to make it in time, though, even with traffic and all.

Though the panel was supposedly about off-beat films, it started with the traditional listing of "best films." Well, more or less--Sawicki said he didn't like anything. Johanson agreed that there was a lot bad, and that the "mediocre were really mediocre." She did like *Chicken Run* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Leeper said that he would pick *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* as the best.

Kimmel said that *Chicken Run* almost made his top ten list of **all** films, not just science fiction

and fantasy. He also recommended *Little Vampire* (and said his four-year-old liked it as well) and *X-Men*. ("Where's the sequel?" he asked as soon as the latter ended.) Leeper said that he thought only people who had a previous knowledge of the X-Men would like the movie, but Kimmel said he had no previous knowledge and still liked it, and Johanson said it was also true of her. Kimmel thought the death camp opening was very effective. "It didn't cheapen the movie," he said, "it deepened the movie." He described *Frequency* as "a male weepy." He also noted that the *Locus* list omitted *Waking the Dead* (based on a novel by Scott Spenser) as well as *Unbreakable*. (The panelists were working from a list of science fiction and fantasy films published on the *Locus* web site.") Johanson said that contrary to the title, *Waking the Dead* was not supernatural, but everyone agreed that the omission of *Unbreakable* was inexplicable.

Kimmel then asked what film the panelists thought the most over-rated or over-hyped. Sawicki said his choice would *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, and Leeper had said something similar earlier. (Leeper said that his objection to it was "I like the laws of physics.") Johanson disagreed, saying she thought it was great. I noted that it was a tremendous success at the Toronto International Film Festival, winning the Audience Choice Award before all the hyping started. Kimmel said he was dreading the Harry Potter film and *Lord of the Rings*, or at least the hype surrounding them. Johanson singled out *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* as being tremendously over-hyped.

As for the worst, or as Kimmel put it, "the best symbol of how bad movies were" in 2000, the consensus was *Battlefield Earth*. Leeper added that he had heard it was also "the most over-hyped, because it's a lot worse than people are claiming." (Think about it.) In fact, noted New York film critic Paul Wunder, who **never** said anything bad about movies, panned *Battlefield Earth*. (Ironically, it was the last film he reviewed before he died. One must appreciate the fact that perhaps in some sense he unknowingly redeemed himself with this.) Kimmel said that he likes the fact that there is usually some film around July which allows him to say, "We've seen the worst and it will only get better."

Of the films Leeper had seen, he thought that *Hollow Man* was the worst, and an example of how Hollywood seems to be engaged in a quest to figure out how many different beginnings they can put to a movie that ends with an indestructible psychotic killer. Sawicki disliked *Godzilla 2000* (and here I was thinking I wished I had more slots on the Hugo ballot so I could nominate it). Kimmel also didn't like *Dungeons and Dragons*, which he said he would "call plastic but that would be an insult to sandwich container packages." *Dungeons and Dragons* led someone to mention the ubiquitous Marines ad running in theaters. (I wonder what they were thinking that made them run that before *The Emperor's New Groove*. I mean, the audience for that was children at least ten years too young to enlist in the Marines, or the parents of young children. And us, but we're weird.)

Kimmel asked the panelists why they thought that all the watchability in 2000 came from offbeat sources. Johanson replied that it was because Hollywood was artistically bankrupt. Leeper disagreed, saying that *The Cell* (for example) had some intelligence, and that while the story of *Titan A. E.* was not great, everything else in it was watchable. "There's so much you can do with animation that no one's doing," he noted, commenting especially on the ice field. He said the story reminded him of some of the early works of Alan Dean Foster. (The last time Leeper said this, it was to speculate in 1977 that Alan Dean Foster was the real author of the novel *Star Wars*. This was eventually confirmed ten years later.)

Johanson also had kudos for *Mission to Mars*, saying the scientists acted like scientists. And Kimmel thought it had the best product placement of the year (using Dr. Pepper to find the leak).

Someone in the audience disagreed with Leeper on *The Cell*, saying that while it was gorgeous to look at, it was "a mansion built on loose dirt," and bad when considered as a detective film.

Connie Hirsch thought that *Unbreakable* had very long takes. Sawicki agreed, saying that "the guy fell in love with his camera." Kimmel said it was "like watching cement set." (But I had watched *Contact* and Jodie Foster talked about how Zemeckis liked long takes as well.) Kimmel also said, however, to someone who liked it, "You don't need me to validate your opinion."

Johanson thought that this was a film one had to be a comic book fan for. From the audience, Bob Devney said that the film seemed to treat comic books as mythic. Johanson thought this a bit strong, but said that the film at least treated them seriously.

Other films recommended by audience members were *Space Cowboys*, *The Ninth Gate*, and "George Lucas in Love" (a short film that started out on the web in 1999). Leeper liked *Shadow of the Vampire* but recommended that people see *Nosferatu* first. (Someone in the audience asked if he meant the Werner Herzog film. No, the Murnau.) One complaint he had was that they used long fingernails on Willem Dafoe rather than long fingers. Someone else said they thought that *The Emperor's New Groove* was very "un-Disney." Johanson thought that *Rocky & Bullwinkle* and *Bedazzled* were fun, if not great. Kimmel agreed on *Bedazzled*, noting that Brendan Fraser "does goofy so well," and Leeper thought the make-up was hilarious.

Sawicki described *Dracula 2000* by saying "if you thought everything had been done to Dracula, see this." Leeper thought there were some good ideas in *Disney's The Kid*.

Someone in the audience thought that *X-Men* captured the feeling of adolescence, and that also it was not just vigilantism. Kimmel said he "loved that scene at the prison at the end." Leeper said that this seemed to have the same problem as many films--the villains have convenient power levels. That is, they are strong enough to be dangerous but not so strong that they can win easily. A fifty-foot Godzilla never fights a ten-foot opponent.

Devney thought *X-Men* perfectly captured a mix of angst and wisecracks, and other thought that it also respected scientists.

Devney liked *Dinosaur*, because even the villain had reasons. He also liked *The Gift*.

Someone in the audience objected to the bad physics in *Mission to Mars*. The objection they gave was that someone would not continuously fire their rocket pack, but would use short bursts and coast. Actually, I think they're wrong here. It wasn't just that the character was trying to get somewhere eventually; she was attempting to reach a receding target and speed was of the essence.

Someone questioned the presence of *Chocolat* on the list. Kimmel (I think) described it as having mild fantasy. We saw it a week later; I would describe it as magical realism.

Nevil Shute: 50s Bestseller and Unknowing SF Author

Saturday 10:00AM

Robert Devney (m), John R. Douglas, Janice Gelb, Lisa Hunt, Peter Weston

Description: "A look at the once wildly popular writer of *On The Beach* and other true spec fic hits. Why he shouldn't be just your father's favorite author."

Devney noted that the panelists could be called "Shuteheads," and that there is in fact Nevil Shute fandom and even Nevil Shute conventions. (There is also a web site at <http://www.changeover.com/shute>.) Devney began with a brief biography of Shute, who was a British aeronautical engineer who moved to Australia.

Devney said that the science fiction of Nevil Shute's that everyone knows is of course *On the Beach*, but many of his other books have speculative fiction content. Douglas described Shute's writing as "a non-science fiction approach to science fiction." Weston said he was "the most Heinleinesque writer I know." He added that Gregory Benford and Tom Shipley are also great admirers of Shute.

Gelb talked quite a bit about *In the Wet*, Shute's other overtly science fictional work. She remembered an extended dream sequence about one character's life as a pilot, and said, "Most of his books slag on England after the war, saying there's no hope for England after the war." That is undoubtedly tied up with his move to Australia, and in *In the Wet* he actually moves the monarchy to Australia as well.

Douglas said that politically, Shute could be described as a conservative libertarian. Gelb added, "All of his protagonists are normal guys," contrasting this with Heinlein's, who are all very over-bearing. Someone else described his protagonists as "decent guys," which was certainly part of the reason for Shute's popularity. Douglas added, "Shute's heroes handle what hits them," and compared Shute's *Trustee from the Toolbox* with Heinlein's *Have Spacesuit Will Travel*, and *Ruined City* (about a plan to bring ship-building back to Sharples) to *The Man Who Sold the Moon*. On the other hand, Douglas also said, "Many of Shute's characters are master-class self-guilts."

Other works with speculative fiction content included *Round the Bend* (which looks at myth and religion) and *An Old Captivity* (about an expedition to Greenland). However, Douglas disagreed somewhat, saying that *Round the Bend* had no flavor of science fiction or fantasy. He said it was more like *Religion and the Art of Aeronautical Maintenance*. Gelb commented that *Round the Bend* reminded her of the Shakers in its undertone of "the excellence of work as a way to praise God." From the audience, Michael Devney added that in it Shute also gives an Arab religion respect, something rather rare at the time.

Douglas thought *An Old Captivity* "wonderfully romantic," particularly in its flashback dream sequence, but Gelb said she was disappointed by the ending. (The panelists worked very hard at not telling too much of any of the books, though there was certainly an assumption that people knew the general plots of *On the Beach* and *A Town Like Alice*.)

Gelb mentioned Shute's other very well-known work, *A Town Like Alice* (originally titled *The Legacy* in the United States, but reverting to the original title after the mini-series). "*Alice* is probably the chick book of Nevil Shute." (Sorry, Janice, but this is likely to make this one of his last books I read.)

Douglas said that another one somewhat well-known because it was made into a movie was *No Highway* (made into *No Highway in the Sky* with James Stewart and Marlene Dietrich). It has what Douglas called "fractional science fiction content. The hero, not too surprisingly, is an aeronautical engineer studying metal fatigue in the Reindeer, a new type of plane. The boffin hero predicts that the tail will fall off after a certain number of hours. I'm not sure of the date for the book *No Highway* but the film was from 1951, and the book must have pre-dated it. Ironically, in 1953, the British launched the Comet, the first jet airliner--and its tail suffered metal fatigue and fell off! I commented on the period flavor of the film--for example, the air hostess talking about how air hostesses all have to be registered nurses.

Gelb said that one thing she noticed in Shute's books was that there were never any references to sex (except for one episode in *A Town Like Alice* involving a pregnant fifteen-year-old). I'm not sure this was all that unusual for the time when Shute wrote.

Weston noted that in *Ordeal* (a.k.a. *What Happened to the Corbetts*), Shute assumed that air bombing would destroy civilization. Douglas said that *Ordeal* was a major science fiction

extrapolation for its time, even though three years later it was outdated. Shute, he said, didn't read a lot of science fiction, nor make a lot of concessions to it. Devney described Shute's work as having engineering as the "surround," but with science fiction content in things like astral projection. Hunt said it was what she thought of as sociological science fiction.

Though *On the Beach* is most people's entry point to Shute, it is also one of the panelists' least favorite Shute books. Weston dislikes it because "everyone is so damned upper-lip."

Douglas said that in general Shute had no villains; "The universe is the villain." And Gelb said that *On the Beach* fails because Shute is "going from the situation in, instead of from the people out."

Though they are mostly out of print in the United States now, they became widely known in the 1950s (?) when Ballantine issued many of them in paperback. (While they are out-of-print, they are easily available from on-line used book dealers, from the UK--or Australia, one suspects--or in libraries.) When asked why Shute's books were out of print, Douglas said, "The new drives out the old." It is often interest in an author's most recent book that keeps up interest in his older ones, and "it's hard to keep a dead author going."

I believe that it was Devney who summarized the experience of reading Shute as "I start feeling quiet and then I feel deeply satisfied."

Origami Demonstration & Workshop
Saturday 11:00AM
Mark R. Leeper

Mark reported that although he had come up with some new figures for people to fold this year, the attendees were mostly beginners and he ended up re-doing some of the basic ones he had taught previous years.

The Urban Legends of Publishing: Things That Aren't So
Saturday 11:00AM
Ellen Asher, Ginjer Buchanan, Patrick Nielsen Hayden (m), Charles Ryan

Description: "Everyone has heard about the Thor Power Tools decision and how it made the SF midlist a wilderness filled with wolves and windswept, bare ground and little else. But did it? What's the reality? SF is in a long-term decline and the publishers can no longer make money on anything but best-sellers. True? The panel talks about their industry and the stories we tell about it. They debunk **some** of them. Come and find out which!"

Nielsen Hayden started by saying this sounded like "And then the author and the editor got out of the car and walked around to the other side and there was the hook--the narrative hook."

First, Thor Power Tools. Many years ago, there was a court ruling about how companies could or could not be taxed on their inventory. The general belief seems to be that this is why there is a much smaller backlist than there used to be. The fact is that publishers, and everyone else, figured out how to get around this ruling without destroying all their inventory, although Buchanan said that some publishers did use the ruling as an excuse for letting some books go out of print. The truth is that warehouse space is finite, and as long as publishers keep publishing new books, some of the old will have to go. (See later comments about publishing on demand, however.)

Nielsen Hayden said that the perception was fueled by the "general sucking demand from the readers for anything that looked remotely like fantasy or science fiction" in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This led to a huge increase in the number of those titles, and not surprisingly, this meant that they could not all be kept in print indefinitely.

Asher said that the Science Fiction Book Club had 50% more titles in print ten or fifteen years ago. But a change in management dictated that all the related book clubs had to cut their backlists (someone saw the figures for the cost of warehouse space versus profitability), and as it turns out, the readership is buying fewer older books anyway. Nielsen Hayden noted in passing that Asher is the longest continually employed book editor in the science fiction field (twenty-eight years).

Nielsen Hayden thinks the backlist situation has improved over the last decade. Asher pointed out that in part this was because works were republished, often in trade paperback (for example, the Orb line from Tor books), rather than being kept in print. She added that this was because one needs fewer sales to keep a trade paperback active than a mass market one. Nielsen Hayden agreed, but said that the net effect was positive, no matter how it was achieved.

Someone asked about "trade" versus "mass market." Nielsen Hayden explained that the bookstores are the "trade" and they need a backlist to fill them. As he put it, the large superstores have all the best-sellers up front, but if they had a store with only best-sellers, they wouldn't survive. They need the depth of coverage to bring people in. This addressed what he had earlier said was the second great urban legend about publishing: that the evil chain stores are the author of all our woes.

Someone asked about print on demand, to which Nielsen Hayden responded, "Now there's a publishing legend for you--print on demand." Asher said that for print on demand to succeed, the reader/buyer has to know what he wants. There is no display in the stores, nor much of an advertising budget to speak of. Nielsen Hayden said that another fact that people don't understand is that "Publishing is not printing." A publisher needs to make books public and create a demand for them.

Nielsen Hayden said that e-books aren't there yet either, but that hundreds of upper management hours have been spent trying to make them work.

He also said that he had heard of a meeting in which management said, "I see you published two kinds of books--normal books and best-sellers. You seem to make all your money on best-sellers, so why don't we just sell **them**?" This is probably an urban legend.

Buchanan said that she had heard of some people believing that the slush pile was laminated and made into furniture. There are also recurring rumors of great manuscripts languishing in publishers' offices, expressed as something like "Why are you holding back the next Robert Jordan book?" Nielsen Hayden pointed out the obvious--that publishers have no reason to hold back a book they know will sell well, and every reason to get it out on the shelves.

One story which Nielsen Hayden told he thought was an urban legend, but Buchanan (I think) said that Fred Pohl said it happened to him, so who knows? Briefly, an editor keeps getting terrible manuscripts from the same person and keeps sending out the standard form rejection letter. Finally, after years of this, the editor wants to keep the person from wasting more of his time, so he writes a personal rejection letter, saying that the person has no talent and should try a different line of work. Back comes the response, "I was just about to give up, but the fact that you wrote me a personal letter has encouraged me to keep trying."

Nielsen Hayden said a lot of these urban legends are based on a misconception. "Publishing," he said, "is not set up as an unpublished writers' Olympics."

This led me to think about other manuscript stories. Is the existence of *Last Dangerous Visions* an urban legend? I did ask about stories of manuscripts being rejected dozens of times before being accepted and becoming a big success. This is apparently true, at least for some, the best known of which is probably *A Confederacy of Dunces* by John Kennedy Toole. (I've also heard it was true of *Watership Down* by Richard Adams and *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* by Richard Bach.) Someone said that it was also true of "Thomas Covenant" by Stephen R. Donaldson. Everyone thought it was too long; only Lester Del Rey had the idea to make it a trilogy.

It is also true that occasionally people will re-submit already published works as a way to "test" editors and see if they can recognize quality, though usually these are spotted. It was claimed that even the publisher of Jerzy Kosinski's *Steps* didn't recognize it when it was re-submitted under a different name, though the panelists were skeptical. Teresa Nielsen Hayden said that someone re-submitted *The Worm Ouroboros* by E. R. Eddison to Tor--what were they thinking? Not only is it a classic, but the style is also very distinctive.

Someone (I?) asked about changing text from British to American editions, mentioning the first "Harry Potter" book as an example. Buchanan said this was due to the publisher's "unreasoning hatred of the letter --u'." Nielsen Hayden said that frequently they just shoot the British plates. Someone suggested that the changes in the first "Harry Potter" book were because it was a children's/young adult book and they didn't want to confuse young American readers.

But mindless editing can make things worse. Nielsen Hayden told the story of an author who wrote for the magazine *Plant Technology* (as in industrial plants). Their major rival was *Factory News*, so the writers were forbidden to use the word "factory" and must always use "plant." The result, Nielsen Hayden said, was that one day a story read that someone was "satisplant" about something. This is certainly possible in these days of word-processors, but I had the impression that this pre-dated those, which is less likely.

When the panelists were asked for any urban legends about marketing, Buchanan responded, "That it works?" There is, however, a superstition about not having green covers. Buchanan said there is also the (false) belief that books fail because of the publisher's actions or inactions.

Related to publishing urban legends are publishing lies: "We'll fix that in the paperback," "Everyone loved the cover," and "No one will notice that."

(I had to leave this panel early to prepare for the next one, so this will end rather abruptly here.)

[The first part of this log was written on our flight to Vietnam. The following is being written on a mini-bus from Nha Trang to Hoi An. Since this trip is supposed to take eleven hours, I hope to get a lot done, potholes permitting.]

[Update: We just transferred from a mini-bus to a full-sized--and full--Daewoo. The potholes and general road surface are even worse than those on the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway. And the BQE has no oxen-drawn carts to complicate things.]

The Moral Ambiguity of Alternate History **Saturday 12:00n**

Gregory Feeley (m), Daniel Hatch, Evelyn C. Leeper, Timothy E. Liebe, Beth Nachison

Thesis: "Alternate history has grown over the past twenty years from one of the genre's exotic variants to a major category (as ubiquitous in science fiction as cats are in fantasy) its morally objectionable nature has become unmistakable. Alternate history takes the history of violent conflict--that inexpugnable mural of human misery--and plays games with it. It's hardly

accidental that --alternate history' is concerned almost exclusively with replaying the outcomes of wars, usually the coffee-table book favorites. Devotees claim they are engaging in --thought experiments,' but really, alternate-history novels about the victory of the Third Reich are no more serious--and no less offensive in their appeal--than thrillers about secret plans for the Fourth Reich."

I think the thesis was more Feeley trying to be provocative than being a completely accurate expression of his beliefs.

Hatch began by agreeing somewhat, saying, "Much of the alternate history written in the last ten years is adolescent fascist fantasy." I would note--and did say later--that this is true of science fiction in general, particularly military science fiction. Liebe thought that there was far too much "table-top gaming" in alternate history. We all agreed, I think, that this was in large part because it was easier to write (and read) alternate histories on based battles--people know about them.

From the audience, Greer Gilman said that she thought most historical fiction was alternate history, in that people usually have modern values.

Paul Kincaid said he thought a distinction should be drawn between counterfactuals (which examine the moment of change, or point of departure) and alternate history (which examines the effects). Alternate history, he said, is more interesting.

Feeley mentioned something about convergent versus divergent alternate histories. Convergent are those which end up with out present, no matter what changes, and I gather he would put historical fiction in this category if he were to call it alternate history. (I guess one could also stretch this to include secret histories.)

Names were finally named. Feeley thought that Harry Turtledove was one of the best authors of alternate history today. This surprised me, because I think that most of what Turtledove is writing now is the sort of militaristic alternate history that Feeley was complaining about. In my opinion, Turtledove's best alternate histories are his stand-alone shorter ones: "Down in the Bottomlands" and "Counting the Potsherds," for example. I suggested that the best writer of alternate histories now was Robert Silverberg. (Other writers may have written one excellent alternate history, but I'm talking about authors who are known for writing a lot in that sub-genre.)

Someone asks whether "magic works" makes something alternate history. I would say there has to be some historical effect, and the story has to have a historical flavor to it.

For an example of an alternate history that I didn't think fit Feeley's thesis, I gave Stephen Fry's *Making History*, which has among its many other ideas a demonstration of the Law of Unintended Consequences. This to be serves a purpose other than saying, "Look how things might have turned out." It's both a cautionary note to not jump head-first into something assuming the results are obvious, and a reminder that a lot of what went wrong in history was not because people **wanted** it to go wrong, but because even the best-laid schemes.... As with so many things, the turning point in Fry's history is one of those "It seemed like a good idea at the time" things that go awry.

There was a discussion of whether history was over-determined, and whether changing just one element would or would not have the desired result. This led, inevitably, to a discussion of the "Great Man" versus "Tide of History" theories. Someday I'll be on an alternate history panel where this doesn't come up. This wasn't it. Maybe Boskone or Worldcon should just bite the bullet and have a panel, or debate, devoted to just that question. I did learn that the phrase "Great Man" comes from John Carlisle's essay "On Heroes and Hero Worship."

Someone suggested the reason that alternate history is popular is that it deals with ambiguities that are safely in the past. There was some discussion about this and how so few alternate histories have been written about, say, the Vietnam War (how topical! I am writing this as I pass within a hundred kilometers of My Lai). The reasoning is that for too many people, the Vietnam War is an ambiguity that is not "safely in the past."

Someone suggested that perhaps all popular entertainment was fascist, in that it seemed to consist of a limited number of heroes fighting a limited but larger number of antagonists.

I suggested that for any art, there are three questions to be asked: What is the intent? What is the purported intent? What is the result?

For example, S. M. Stirling's "Draka" stories were an example given of morally corrupt stories, because the reader sees them as defending the Draka. Now, Stirling claims he is not writing for this, but rather to show how evil the Draka are. I would suggest that even assuming this is true, the fact that people are not reading them this way should give Stirling pause, because he is not communicating what he is trying to communicate.

Someone pointed out this is also considered in the film *Cradle Will Rock*.

The End of the Past by Aldo Schiavone was mentioned here for some reason.

"The Lions Are Asleep This Night" by Howard Waldrop was given by Feeley as an example of an alternate history story that is not morally corrupt.

Paul Kincaid suggested two more alternate history stories that are not morally corrupt: "Envoy Extraordinary" by William Golding and *Guns of the South* by Harry Turtledove.

Feeley closed the panel by noting, "we are not rounding up these stories," to which I added, "and labeling them degenerate art."

[There is now a long gap, because the roads in Vietnam get worse as you head north, and may well be the worst we've ever seen. In fact, due to travel, illness, and Passover, this isn't resumed until over two weeks after our return.]

Science and Faith

Saturday 2:00PM

Judith Berman, Jeffrey A. Carver (m), Esther Friesner, James D. Macdonald

Description: "The relationship between science and present-day American society is close but like any close relationship sometimes has its rocky parts. How does science fiction--the only part of our popular culture which ties science to the arts--fit into this? Has SF contributed to a stronger and more realistic public understanding of science, has it hurt, or is it essentially irrelevant? How does SF treat the relationship between science and faith? Fundamentalism has been a deep current in American society for much longer than SF has been around. Does SF contribute to mutual understanding? Or does SF simply dismiss fundamentalism as kookery unworthy of serious consideration?"

Berman identified herself as an anthropologist of religion.. Friesner is a Reform Jew who has written such religious works as *The Psalms of Herod* and edited such non-religious works as *Chicks in Chainmail*. Macdonald said he is a Catholic who writes allegories disguised as science fiction and that his latest was a refutation of the Manichaeian heresy. Carver said he rarely discusses religion overtly in his stories, but it's there. He said he was Presbyterian, then

agnostic, and now Congregationalist.

Berman started by saying that the Victorians thought there were two separate mind-sets: their rational one and the native's magical one. The natives, on the other hand, knew you needed both your magic **and** to plant the yams, that is, the yams will not appear through magic alone. They knew that the rational level was needed as well. "The Heaven's Gate people," she said, "forgot you have to plant the yams."

Macdonald said that the last hundred years have seen an opposition between science and religion that didn't exist before. (Newton, for example, wrote far more on theology than science and didn't find the two at all incompatible.) The rise of American Fundamentalism in the 1920s contributed to this. Macdonald said that we needed to remember, "Religion is a way of looking at truth. Science is a way of looking at truth."

Friesner noted that science and religion are both about control, that is, our attempt to control or at least understand the world. Berman agreed, but said they required fundamentally different thought processes. The panelists also pointed out that there is opposition within science and within religion as well as between the two.

Carver asked, "Why do people have the faith they do?" The panelists hastened to make clear that they were not equating faith with fundamentalism. Someone (I didn't note who) said, "Fundamentalism is the scariest face of faith." Referencing back to science fiction, Friesner said, "FTL drive, leap of faith, you decide." And an audience member pointed out he had never seen a proton. ("I never saw a moor,/I never saw the sea;/Yet know I how the heather looks,/And what a wave must be./I never spoke with God,/Nor visited in heaven; Yet certain am I of the spot/As if the chart were given.") ("I never saw a photon,/I never saw a wave;/Yet know I of just what they are/By how they do behave.")

Picking up on some of this, Berman claimed, "Science fiction is the literature of religion because it's about transcendent things. She gave an example of a story by Robert Reed (title not given) about the birth of a universe. Someone in the audience asked whether some science fiction books take it too far. Well, yes, of course. One example mentioned was the "Left Behind" series, though whether that is science fiction or fantasy can be argued. But Berman pointed out that it can be skillfully done, as C. S. Lewis did in the "Chronicles of Narnia." (I feel obliged to point out that this is not a universal opinion, and some people find the Narnia books rather heavy-handed.) And of course that whole argument revolves in large part about whether you believe the basic premise, particularly in a series such as "Left Behind." One needs to distinguish between works written for the believers and works written for the general audience.

Berman also said that science can be a religion, and Friesner said that religion can be a science. Berman gave as an example a man being crushed by a collapsing granary. Science gives reasons why the granary might have collapsed, but the answer to "why then?" (as opposed to ten seconds later after he had walked on) is still mystical.

Carver asked for examples of works in which science and religion meet. Friesner immediately named "The Star" by Sir Arthur C. Clarke. Macdonald suggested that maybe the inhabitants of the planet welcomed that death, but an audience member pointed out that that was not what was said in the story.

Berman suggested several works by James Morrow. (In fact, practically his entire oeuvre would qualify.) Carver observed that Morrow believes that spirituality is an evil force and the sooner we stamp it out the better. Berman feels that Morrow is in an argument with Christianity, and Carver wondered if this reflects a desire of his to have some level of belief and his fighting against this. Carver noted, for example, that Morrow tends to set up straw men to attack.

Friesner said that this was what she called the "Neener, neener!" school of criticism, in which she included not only Morrow's "Bible Stories for Adults," but also such works as Gregory Maguire's *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* and *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister*, Geoff Ryman's *Was*, and various other retellings of fairy tales, the distinguishing factor being that in these, the "villain" of the traditional telling recounts his or her point of view. (Ellen Asher said that in many cases this also involves "literalizing the metaphor" to show reactions.)

Returning to science fiction, Berman said that most futures in space appear to have no religion. Someone asked if there were any treatments of God as immanent rather than transcendent, so that science is a religious exercise. Carver said that Orson Scott Card might qualify, drawing as he does on his Mormon background. And Macdonald said that some of his works involves mages and adepts manipulating reality in the mind of God (*The Stars Asunder*, *The Price of the Stars*, *Star Pilot's Grave*, *By Honor Betrayed*, *The Gathering Flame*, *The Long Hunt*, and the upcoming *A Working of Stars*). All of these, he said, are based on orthodox Catholicism. (I assume that is "orthodox" as in "strict" rather than "Orthodox" as in "Eastern." It's not always easy to hear capitalization. For that matter, I'm guessing which of the many homonyms was meant when I say "immanent" above.)

I'll recommend *Mysterium* by Robert Charles Wilson as a lesser known book that attempts to look at religion scientifically. (Although admittedly by now we have drifted far afield from the supposed topic.)

Why the SF Channel and Too Many SF Movies Suck
Saturday 4:00PM
Michael A. Burstein, Robert Devney (m), Daniel Kimmel

Description: "Our companion panel to the best of the media year (--Unbreakable Chicken') is this review of the worst. Why so much *bad* media SF gets made. Is there any hope for the future? Are there any guilty pleasures to be discovered?"

As part of his qualifications for this panel, Burstein claimed he was in crowd scenes in both *The Front* and *Radio Days*.

Burstein said that there was so much bad science fiction on television because of money. Science fiction shouldn't rely on special effects, he said, but people want to see them and they cost. Devney responded, "You don't need special effects, you need special writers."

Kimmel gave what may be the worst reason for watching *Star Trek: Voyager* I've heard: that he's expected to for panels. He said that a science fiction show needs a strong controlling personality, such as Rod Serling or Gene Roddenberry. He also said that the only reason *Star Trek: Deep Space 9* was any good was because the "suits" weren't watching it, they were watching *Star Trek: Voyager*.

Burstein said that if the writing was good, people will forgive cheesy special effects.

Someone observed that one problem was that great actors don't do episodic television. (Andreas Katsulas was given as an exception, but why he is more of an exception than Patrick Stewart is not clear to me, and in any case neither of them is Robert Duvall or Anthony Hopkins.)

Asked for the worst science fiction on television, Kimmel immediately responded, "Besides *Voyager*?" *Black Scorpion* was named. Also, *Earth: Final Conflict* was good the first season, and then the rest was bad. (This sounds like the *Sliders* pattern.)

Burstein said that another problem was that for television you need something new every week.

What about movies? Kimmel suggested that coming from books, we may have a misunderstanding of what to expect from movies. We keep wondering why *Dune*, *Starship Troopers*, and so on don't "live up" to the books. Burstein suggested *Bicentennial Man* as a good movie, and quoted Michael Ordovery, who said, "You have to find the short story within the novel and film that." (Devney at this point begged, "Stop us before we subreference again.") At the suggestion that Hollywood should be adapting short stories rather than novels, Burstein exclaimed, "Hollywood should be contacting me, goddammit!"

There is also a feeling that the better the book, the harder it is to adapt it into a movie.

Burstein cited *Contact* and *Gattaca* as good science fiction movies.

Something led Devney to make comments on Jennifer Lopez, which in turn led his brother Michael to say, "In the Devney family, we are going to take care of this problem."

From the audience, Mark Leeper claimed that a higher percentage of released science fiction films are good than the percentage of published science fiction novels that are good.

I claimed that we make it easy by being too easy to please, and that we need to get out of the mindset that we have to go see bad science fiction movies just to support science fiction. Even assuming our presence mattered, we don't send the message to Hollywood that we want to see more good science fiction; we send the message that we'll go to see any crap they turn out just so long as it's science fiction. Of course, science fiction fandom is so small compared to the general movie-going public that it doesn't matter either way, so why waste your time on a bad movie?

As Kimmel noted, "There are a lot of clueless people out there" who think they know how movies should be made--for example, people who are petitioning to get Tom Bombadil back into the *Lord of the Rings* movies.

Asked what he wants from the SciFi Channel, Kimmel said, "Something more than re-runs of old shows that I wouldn't watch on network TV."

Kimmel closed by pointing out, "There is good stuff being made. You have to look for it. If it's bad and doesn't say --Star Trek' on it you don't have to watch it."

(In some context, Devney observed, "It's not --The Cider House **Rules**', it's "The Cider House Rules."")

**Book Launch Reception and Autographing:
Immodest Proposals: The Complete William Tenn Vol. 1
Saturday 5:00PM**

What can one say about a book launch? There was one.

**Crouching Tiger, Hidden Masterpiece
Sunday 10:00AM
Claire Anderson, Robert Devney (m), MaryAnn Johanson, Mark R. Leeper**

Description--"It's a martial arts showcase, a gorgeous romance, an Eastern **and** a Western--find out why some are calling *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* the "Star Wars" of fantasy films."

(Devney said that being on panels made it difficult for him to collect quotes for his *Devniad*. "I listen to everything you say and then put in all the really dirty bits," was how he described it.)

When this panel was first mentioned, it was before the Oscar nominations were announced, and even then I suggested that calling this a hidden masterpiece implied some new definition of the word "hidden" with which I was previously unfamiliar. Certainly by the time of the convention, its ten Oscar nominations and appearance on the cover of *Entertainment Weekly* put paid to that description entirely.

Devney began by saying that the original title, *Wo Hu Zang Long*, means "hiding your strength from others." (I had also heard that one of the character's names contains within its ideogram the ideogram for "dragon." Later someone said that the character name "Lo" means "Little Tiger" and the character name "Jen" means "Little Dragon.")

Leeper began by saying that the film was neither hidden nor a masterpiece. However, it was claimed that there were still a lot of places where it hadn't opened yet. (That changed.)

Johanson said it reminded her of seeing *Star Wars* for the first time and that the audience broke into spontaneous applause at the end of the first fight sequence. (This happened at the Toronto International Film Festival as well.) Devney noted that *Star Wars* also had an Eastern source, Kurosawa's *Hidden Fortress*. Leeper disagreed, saying that *Hidden Fortress* provided only some minor elements to *Star Wars*.

Devney said that *Star Wars* was the coming-of-age of science fiction films and similarly, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* was the coming-of-age of Hong Kong martial arts films. Anderson said that the film was a tribute to three generations of martial artists and that there was lots of back-story. Johanson said that it also had genuinely strong women, not the "Charlie's Angels" type, and Anderson said that there was in fact a long tradition of this in Chinese films. Someone asked if this made this a "chick flick." Leeper quoted the film *Mating Habits of the Earthbound Human*: "Females like to see one person die slowly. Males like to see many people die quickly."

Leeper pointed out that one often-overlooked difference between Eastern and Western movies is that Western flying is horizontal, while Eastern is vertical. In a sense it is the difference between diving and leaping. (An audience member said that Peter Pan was one Western character who flew vertically.)

Someone said that the best fight sequence was the one in the trees, which was very dreamlike. This led Devney to say, "In my dreams, there are more straight sex scenes." (I guess this qualifies as one of the really dirty bits.)

Leeper said that one problem here, as well as in most movies, is that all the battles involve equally matched fighters. Someone said that the inn scene was an exception, and Anderson said that that sort of inn scene was traditional in Chinese martial arts films.

Leeper said that one thing that made the film work was that Ang Lee got the best people, both in the cast and in the crew, to cooperate and reinforce each other.

Devney said that the film is actually an Eastern Western. The sweeping vistas of the desert scenes are impressive, perhaps all the more so because (as Leeper reminded people) the entire film was all shot within a couple of hours of Beijing. (Here is an example of how a great director can make a film a lot cheaper than an average one. An average director would decide

he needed to take his production to five different countries and set up an entire camp for them. Lee filmed everything such that every night the entire cast and crew returned to their hotel rooms in Beijing.) And Leeper also said that all countries have outdoor films. The United States had Westerns, but Germany had its "Berg" ("Mountain") films, and so on.

Anderson said that the film was set over two thousand years ago, which led someone to ask when the Forbidden City was actually built (early 15th century, it turns out), and someone else pointed out that the girl says she is a true Manchu, which would place it more in the 17th century range. And there was much comment about the fact that in whatever time period one would choose, there still were no bound feet shown. (One can argue that as a princess, the girl would certainly have bound feet. One can also argue that you wouldn't have much of a movie then, because I don't think one can do martial arts very effectively in bound feet. I think we need to grant the filmmaker some license.)

Devney talked a little about Ang Lee and the fact that his films, disparate as they seem, tend all to be about honor and family expectations. (His films include *The Wedding Banquet*, *Eat Drink Man Woman*, *The Ice Storm*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Ride with the Devil*.) His next film will be *The Hulk*.

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon cost only \$14 million. In addition to the elimination of huge budgets for remote location shooting, there was also a savings in that there were no huge salaries for any of the stars. (*Restoration* is another film that looks way more expensive than it was. It cost \$18 million.)

Just as an Italian reviewer referred to James Bond films as "Kiss Kiss Bang Bang," Devney said that *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* was "Kick Kick Think Think." In fact, Asian audiences didn't like it as much as Americans, saying that there were too many slow scenes. (And doesn't that sound like something American audiences are always being accused of?) Leeper said that in effect, Lee folded Henry James's *Age of Innocence* into a martial arts film.

Also, Chinese audiences said that the actors sounded funny. The film was in Mandarin, but neither of the two main actors spoke Mandarin, and learned their lines phonetically. (Michelle Yeoh speaks English and Cantonese; Chow Yun Fat speaks Cantonese, though he seems to speak some English as well.)

Bruce Burdick said that he was told that the accent was actually historical Mandarin. And Jack Cohen added that the story was actually from an older Oriental/Chinese tradition, but modern Chinese audiences have been corrupted and don't appreciate it anymore. Traditional Chinese stories have a sense of continuity, not a sense of closure. People don't walk off into the sunset together. (Does this make *Casablanca* a traditional Chinese story?) Referring to the synthesis of story and music in Chinese tradition, Cohen admitted, "I don't understand Verdi, but I don't understand Chinese opera in a very different way." Regarding the music, Anderson said that Chinese movies have very diverse scores, and this followed that tradition. (And won an Academy Award for it as well.)

The scenewriter, James Schamus, wrote the script in English, which was then translated from English to Mandarin and Mandarin to English several times. Johanson said that one advantage *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* had was that "fantasy films have plundered European mythologies" but that this was fresh.

Because of the wide appeal of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, and because it was based on volume four of a series, there is certainly the possibility of a prequel.

Leeper put in a final recommendation for another Chinese epic of last year, *The Emperor and*

the Assassin.

The Orson Welles Martian Invasion Panic
Sunday 11:00AM
William Tenn

Description: "H. G. Wells' *War of the Worlds* is a great story, but it didn't come out of nothing--there was a popular tradition of invasion stories at the time. Hear all about it from one of the most interesting and knowledgeable speaker's you're likely to meet."

Tenn began by saying that the entire description was a lie--except for the "interesting and knowledgeable" part.

In 1988, Tenn wrote an article for the *New York Times Book Review* in commemoration of the hundredth anniversary of Wells's book and the fiftieth anniversary of Welles's radio play. It was slightly re-written in 1998 and will be published in *Syzygy*. The reading of this article was the gist of his talk.

Tenn began by citing *The Invasion from Mars: A Study in the Psychology of Panic* by Hadley Cantrell, published in 1940. But few people, Tenn noted, who talk about Welles talk about Wells as well. Heywood Hale Broun, for example, attributed the panic in 1938 to the wartime atmosphere and the recent take-over of Czechoslovakia, but didn't talk at all about any of the inherent elements in the original work that might have contributed to the panic.

Tenn said that one needed to look at the "techniques of verisimilitude" used by Wells (and Welles): a documentary approach, the interspersal of actual people and places and journals, the assumption of a personal knowledge on the part of the reader. Wells also wrote about a mass panic, which Tenn believes is the first mass panic ever described in fiction, as well as being about the first real alien extra-terrestrials in fiction. (Earlier extra-terrestrials were human or humanoid, often just idealized people).

Somewhat counter to the notion that it was wartime jitters that caused the 1938 panic, Radio Quito created exactly the same sort of panic in 1947 when they did a version of *War of the Worlds*. Unlike the United States version though, where miraculously no one died, the Ecuadorian story had a more tragic end: when the enraged public discovered the hoax, they burned the station, killing the author.

In his novel, Tenn said, Wells was responding to British colonialism in general and to the Zulu uprising in particular. There was also a parallel of the Spanish conquistadors' horses in the Martian war machines. Wells's message was: "As we have done, so shall we not be done to?" And regarding the flight from the Martians, Tenn said, "I think H. G. Wells would have seen it as a headlong flight from justice."

Unfortunately, just as Tenn finished the paper and opened the floor to questions and discussion, I had to leave for my next panel. However, Mark was able to tell me some of what was said. Tenn had heard the original broadcast, because he always listened to the Mercury Theater. He was with a group of people who arrived at someone's apartment late and didn't hear the beginning, but immediately recognized that it was *War of the Worlds*.

There were a couple of incidents he recounted. An older couple later reported that they were ready to commit suicide when they saw the first smoke. And a couple in New York called their daughter in New Jersey and asked how she was. She said "Terrible" and screamed. They immediately drove all the way to her place, only to find out she was fine. (Later she said "it felt

like right thing to say"!)

There were broadcasting disclaimers, but too late. Estimates are that one million people panicked. Tenn said that really the people who panicked were the smart ones: the first ones to panic in an emergency are the ones who survive.

**Alternate History Challenge Round
Sunday 12:00N**

Mark Keller, Evelyn C. Leeper, Darrell Schweitzer, Joe Siclari (m)

[There was no description for this, but the title should have told me everything I needed to know, and I should have withdrawn. I really hate this sort of thing. The format of this was that Siclari would present a situation and the rest of the panelists would come up with a scenario that could have led to it.]

(Thanks to Mark Leeper, as always, for taking notes.)

Siclari started by asking the panelists why they like alternate history. Leeper, being her usual cranky self, said she was actually getting bored with what is currently being done, because so much of it is military, with enormous amounts of battle detail but very little examination of societal changes. Schweitzer seconded this complaint.

The first situation was one in which American Indians land on the moon in 1945. Schweitzer postulated that Orthodox rabbis gained control in Constantinople and there was a line of Jewish emperors. In 1900 they come to the New World, where there was a Renaissance in Aztec society, in the quest for a good bagel, and somehow this led to an Aztec space program.

Keller said however that you need a technology to go to the moon, but the Indian dominant culture would not have been technological in the early 20th century. However, a Mestizo culture could be, and mentioned Robert Sobel's *For Want of a Nail* in which the British squash an emerging Mestizo culture. (Mark Leeper asked later whether it was absolutely required to describe this book on every alternate history panel. The answer seems to be yes.)

Figuring that if it worked for Harry Turtledove, it would work for me, I suggested that aliens arrive in the last half of the 19th century and side with the Indians, making them dominant and giving them space travel. (Mark Leeper wrote in his notes, "Thank God you are not a professional writer," to which I can add only, "Amen.") Schweitzer mentioned Somtow's Sucharitkul's *Aquiliad* which assumes a technological Roman Empire that meets up with American Indians. He suggested a timeline in which the Americas take over Europe (is Christopher Evans's *Aztec Century* this idea?), but one must also then postulate that the Americas have more domesticated livestock. Why? Because the diseases that came from Europe were not fatal to Europeans, who had been exposed to them for centuries because of their livestock, but were deadly to the Indians, who had built up no immunity.

Perhaps sensing that an hour of these scenarios would not retain the audience's (or the panelists') interest, Siclari asked whether you can learn history from alternate history. My immediate response would be, yes, but you could end up learning all the wrong things. But if alternate history makes you go out and read the real history, certainly you can learn from it. (I learned my history from reading all (then) ten volumes of Durant, rather than in school.)

Keller said that in history in academia, there is alternate history, only it is called counterfactuals. Schweitzer said, "We pretty much live in an ahistorical culture," and most

people could not tell if Lincoln and Shakespeare were contemporary. (This certainly is true in movies--Mark Leeper had observed that the romance between Imhotep and Ankhnesenamun would have meant that Imhotep was about 1600 years old at the time, and be as if Meryl Streep had an affair with Attila the Hun.)

Keller said that historical knowledge is not necessary to read alternate histories, especially since many are just historical romances or mysteries.

Schweitzer also talked about how popular culture treats history, saying that the end of *The Fall of the Roman Empire* is as if Ken Starr had killed Clinton with a head butt in wrestling ring. Schweitzer also said a lot of science fiction seems to take from history, and gave as an example Obi Wan Aurelius and Darth Commodus. And Hollywood (and most alternate history authors) will do only familiar periods. For example, no one will do Justinian and Theodora, in spite of the potential.

Another situation proposed involved human sacrifices in front of the Eiffel Tower. There were various suggestions involving the Great Wall, the Templars sending a fleet against Perry, and Cagliostro reviving Druidism. This led Leeper to ask when a story which had as a premise that "magic works" was alternate history, and when it was just fantasy. Unfortunately (though not surprisingly), this was not answered. (There was also some discussion of North Africa, which led Mark Leeper to say, "As you value your life, stay off the Moors!")

SF Ref: The Wonderful World of SF Nonfiction
Sunday 2:00PM

David G. Hartwell, Paul Kincaid, Mark L. Olson (m), Darrell Schweitzer

Description: "The SF field has thousands of non-fiction books written about SF, its history, the writers, the art, the science behind it. This panel explores--with examples--the treasure trove of non-fiction books by, about, and for the SF reader. From *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* to *The Physics of Star Trek*, from *Spectrum 7* and *The World Beyond the Hill* and *Mars, All Our Yesterdays* and *I Asimov*, our panelists give you ... just the facts, ma'am."

Olson began by observing that Priscilla Olson, on seeing the program, said that this had to be the most boring panel, but (Mark) Olson said that the audience is the sort who browses encyclopedias. In fact, he said, the word "encyclopedia" is iconic to fans. (I suppose we can thank Isaac Asimov for this.)

C. S. Lewis, in his role of literary critic rather than author, ranked the value of various types of non-fiction works in the study of literature. Most valuable were bibliographies, then textual studies, then literary history or biography, and last of all literary criticism. In particular, I would observe that each pretty much requires that all the preceding types exist.

Hartwell said that one problem with science fiction is that, while in its early years, one person could read or at least be aware of everything non-fiction, around 1980 it became impossible to keep up with it. For one thing, a lot of material began to be published for academic credit ("publish or perish"). And the enormous success of *Star Wars* brought science fiction to the attention of those who cover popular culture.

Schweitzer recommended a few basic works, including Robert Reginald's three-volume bibliography. Donald Tuck, he said, was a good bibliographer, but his critical judgment (i.e., his taste) was not as reliable. Schweitzer emphasized that "Get your facts right" is the most important thing in writing non-fiction. Among the least accurate he named Lin Carter and Michael Moorcock, saying that both wrote (write) from memory rather than checking their

facts. Also, the *Viking Penguin Encyclopedia of Horror and the Supernatural* has many errors, while James Gunn's *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* was butchered by the publisher.

Olson said that Jack Chalker and Mark Owings's *Guide to Small-Press Fiction* was also rife with errors. Hartwell said that unfortunately there was a tendency in academic fields to defend one's errors. He said that Chalker told him that people don't tell him the truth, so he has to find it out. Schweitzer admitted to doing some odd hardcover editions with only one or two copies just to drive Chalker crazy. (To which Kincaid asked, "And you complain about errors?!")

Hartwell noted that Sam Moskowitz never foot-noted anything. Schweitzer said that when he edited Moskowitz (for *Discovering Horror Fiction*), he found that the article on W. C. Morrow (for example) included **everything** that Moskowitz knew. Moskowitz thought that cutting a third of it was okay, but that was the editor's job.

Hartwell recommended the complete works of Everett Bleiler, which he described as thorough and reliable for the period covered (1926-1937). Regarding the problems with completeness for more recent times, Schweitzer said that the early 1970s had many semi-prozines which were not often indexed. Things are no better now, he added, and now there's electronic material as well.

Other names mentioned were Lord Currey, the Conference on the Fantastic (in Florida), and the Science Fiction Research Association. Libraries that have reasonable resources include the Foundation library in Liverpool. (At least I **think** that's what my note means.)

Schweitzer says that one thing he tries to do is to reprint fanzine essays in book form to preserve them.

Regarding literary criticism in particular, Olson said that Damon Knight's *In Search of Wonder* and William Atheling's (James Blish's) *Issue at Hand* and *More Issues at Hand* are good, but much literary criticism is worthless. Schweitzer thought this was in part because of "the French disease" (deconstructionism). Regarding Samuel R. Delany's critical writings, and in particular his reading of a paper on semiotics and deconstructionism at an early Readercon, Schweitzer said that in the entire ballroom of hundreds of people there were, "three people in the front who understood what he was talking about and could ask him incomprehensible questions about it."

Kincaid recommended a collection of Gwyneth Jones's essays from Foundation. He suggested, "If you want to be a critic, pick a writer no one else has written about."

Schweitzer said that the revelations of the *C. S. Lewis Hoax* by Kathryn Ann Lindskoog makes trusting C. S. Lewis posthumous text questionable, and that Walter Hooper was accused with a fair basis. There are also, he said, between six and sixty errors **per page** in the paperback editions of Lovecraft, and that L. Sprague de Camp was the devil of Robert E. Howard fandom because of his alterations of Howard's text. The Berkley editions are the more reliable, he said, and the Donald Grant.) Learned papers have been written analyzing the author's meaning in some of what later turned out to be typographical errors!

Asked for recommendations, the following were listed:

- | Brian W. Aldiss's *Billion Year Spree* (but not his *Trillion Year Spree*)
- | William Atheling's/James Blish's *Issue at Hand* and *More Issues at Hand*
- | Everett's Bleiler's works
- | Thomas D. Clareson's works
- | John Clute's *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*
- | John Clute's *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*
- | James Gifford's *Robert A. Heinlein: A Reader's Companion*

- | Diane Wynne Jones's *Tough Guide to Fantasy*
- | Damon Knight's *In Search of Wonder* (though he had no sympathy for fantasy)
- | Donald Tuck's *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*

(Regarding the Heinlein study, it was observed that Alexei Panshin was inaccurate in both *Heinlein in Dimension* and *The World Beyond the Hill*. Firstly, he seemed to operate in the Hegelian mode of "Correct is what I say, including this definition." And second, he appeared to view science fiction as going towards Isaac Asimov's "Foundation" series and A. E. Van Vogt as an end or goal.)

It was pointed out that ideological criticism is often wrong, and that is the problem with critics such as Darko Suvin, who "tried to shoehorn science fiction into Marxism."

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

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