

**Boskone 28**  
**A convention report by Evelyn C. Leeper**  
**Copyright 1991 by Evelyn C. Leeper**

Table of Contents:

- | [Hotels](#)
- | [Dealers' Rooms](#)
- | [Art Show](#)
- | [Film Program](#)
- | [Programming](#)
- | [The First Night](#)
- | [The Tribble in the Microwave: Fannish Urban Myths](#)
- | [Whither Criticism: The Purpose and Direction of Criticism](#)
- | [Alternate Histories: The Way We Weren't](#)
- | [The North Shall Rise Again: Alternate Civil Wars](#)
- | [Why Doesn't SF Fare Well on the Big Screen?](#)
- | [The Best SF and Fantasy of the 1980s](#)
- | [The Turn of the Century: SF and Fantasy in the Late 19th and Early 20th Century](#)
- | [Sexual Symbolism in Fandom](#)
- | [Around the World in 80 \(or more\) Pages: How Writers Use Their Real Life Travel](#)
- | [African Cultures in Science Fiction](#)
- | [Homophobia in SF](#)
- | [Miscellaneous](#)

Well, the weather conspired against us, and we ended up driving through four separate blizzard conditions before finally arriving in Springfield at 8 PM. (A large accident and construction along I-91 didn't help, but then, there's been construction along that stretch of I-91 for the past twelve years.)

Registration for panelists was in the regular registration area, rather than the Green Room, and this worked well, since all the flyers and such were there also, and the people had no problem finding the additional packet for each of us with our schedules.

### **Hotels**

The easiest way between the Tara and the Marriott way was out the door and across the street. The only problem with this was that it was (again!) very cold and windy and unless you carted your coat around with you it was not inviting. With the smaller size of Boskone, there is no crowding in the hallways or other common areas any more, and it's possible to find places to just sit and talk.

### **Dealers' Rooms**

Last year I had said, "The setup of having a dealers' room in each hotel continued, and will for the foreseeable future. There just isn't enough space in any one room to put all the dealers there without seriously impacting the programming." So they made me a liar. Well, only partly. There was only one dealers' room, but they didn't put all the dealers in it. Rather, they put about 75% of the dealers in it; the rest got no space. This didn't make dealers happy either. As far as content, there were several book dealers, but an increasing number who don't alphabetize their stock--making them worthless to me, since I'm always looking for specific things. There was still too much peripheral stuff: jewelry, T-shirts, etc. (My personal opinion--I'm sure others disagree.) Dealers still complained about low sales--the recession is probably as much a culprit as the smaller space or anything else NESFA has control over. I found some items I was looking for, including some rare Anne Rice novels one friend wanted, a Crowley book for another friend, and even some stuff for me. We also bought some old pulps in Treasure Island, a comic store in the mall just outside the Marriott, and a couple of books in Johnson's Bookstore, the main book store in town, and an old favorite from twenty years ago when I lived in the area.

## Art Show

This was better than last year, and there seemed to be more affordable items. It could be that having Worldcon in Boston put a dent in the pieces still around at the time of last year's Boskone.

## Film Program

The film program was again very small: *The Thing* (the original), *Cat People* (the original), *Wicker Man*, *Throne of Blood*, *Night of the Living Dead* (the original), some short subjects, and an "Ed Emsh Film festival" (which I would have been interested in, but was busy both times it was shown). Ed Emsh was the Artist Guest of Honor, though sadly he died last July, after he was chosen but well before the convention itself.

## Programming

I want my science track back! Boskone used to have a science "guest of honor" (called "featured science speaker," actually), and now they don't even have a science panel. They were supposed to have one on cold fusion, but it was canceled. Well, so was cold fusion, so I suppose it was fitting.

## The First Night

After registering and making a first pass through the dealers' room, I went to the "Meet the VIPs" Party, where I spent most of the time talking to Mike Godwin about Usenet and copyright, and Usenet in general. I tried to convince him to start a "rec.arts.books.reviews" group (with little success, I'm afraid). We also had a discussion with Saul Jaffe about whether or not Internet rules allowed him to include the cover price of a book in a review. I brought this up because he did allow a whole discussion about the \$1.95 pricing on Pulphouse short story booklets. Though Mike and I both argued this was inconsistent, Saul did not appear to have changed his mind any, and he is the moderator, so I guess that's that.

I also had a chance to talk to Michael Kandel and tell him how much I enjoyed his *Strange Invasion* (which I had meant to bring to get it autographed, but forgot).

Mark went to the "Neglected Authors: Jules Verne" panel, but not the "How Fandom Has Changed in the Last 15 Years" one. His observation on the latter was that one way fandom has changed is that Jules Verne is now a neglected author. He also said that he was disappointed that the panelists seemed to be familiar only with Verne's more popular works, by which I assume he means *Around the World in Eighty Days*, *From the Earth to the Moon*, *Journey to the Center of Earth*, *Master of the World*, *The Mysterious Island*, *To the Sun*, *Off on a Comet*, and *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. No mention was made of even the works which Ace published in mass market paperback twenty years ago: *The Begum's Fortune*, *The Carpathian Castle*, *City in the Sahara*, *Into the Niger Bend*, *Tigers & Traitors*, *The Underground City*, *The Village in the Treetops*, and others.

## The Tribble in the Microwave: Fannish Urban Myths

Friday, 10 PM

Tony Lewis (mod), Chip Hitchcock, Teresa Nielsen Hayden, Mike Resnick

The panel started by defining urban myths (a.k.a. urban legends) and mentioning Jan Harold Brunvand's books along these lines (*The Vanishing Hitchhiker* and others). In response to a question as to why Brunvand was working in Utah, someone said it's because Mormons lead boring lives and need urban legends to liven them up. Nielsen Hayden responded, "Mormons do not lead boring lives, but they're in love with faith-promoting stories." Having defined urban myths as stories passed around as true which aren't, the panelists then proceeded to ignore this definition and tell true (but boring) stories about filling other fans' rooms with helium balloons and such. Admittedly, the story of Rick Katze and another large fan load-testing the runway at Conspiracy by skipping down it did at least

provide a humorous image to the audience, but yet another telling of how Harlan Ellison collected money for a damaged screen and then wanted to give the excess to Clarion did nothing for me. (This, by the way, was the origin of the Worldcon Emergency Fund, but eventually someone decided that having Worldcons actually buy insurance was probably a better idea.)

Resnick claimed he got Bob Tucker to give him a cover quote for a novel (something Tucker never does) by refusing to give Tucker directions to the bathroom in his (Resnick's) house unless Tucker provided the quote. This probably really is an urban legend, or at least an exaggeration--I can't imagine that a house could be so confused that someone couldn't find a bathroom on their own.

Someone told the story of when Alexei Panshin came to a NESFA meeting and was asked to help collate (that being a traditional thing to do at a NESFA meeting). He supposedly got all huffy and said he didn't collate fanzines--he was a professional author! Just then Isaac Asimov stuck his head out of the door into the collating room and said, "I'm running out of page four." Well, it *might* be true.

And several people talked about one hotel which had elevator problems that they refused to fix. So one person, who was in an upper-story room, called the fire department to say they were trapped in their room (since none of the working elevators went to his floor). Another called the town's safety inspector, who closed the hotel down for a few days. A third wrote the hotel's insurance carrier, and caused the hotel yet more grief.

They even drifted into the topic of recursive science fiction (science fiction about science fiction authors and conventions). The fact that Lewis just published *An Annotated Bibliography of Recursive Science Fiction* may have had something to do with this.

At the end of the panel, everyone sang a surprise "Happy Birthday" to Lewis, and Resnick read an appreciation of him (of which Resnick said, "If this lacks a certain felicity of expression it's because I didn't write it").

We then went to the Con Suite--a large room with soda and munchies. It seemed very empty, but that's probably better than having it over-crowded. (This was the room in the Tara that was used as a dealers' room the last two years. Come to think of it, maybe they could offer overflow dealer space here for dealers willing to bring their stuff in when they want to sell it and pack it up and removed it when they aren't there.) I picked up a T-shirt from last year's Boskone (always on the look-out for bargains, and they discount them heavily after the con is over).

### **Whither Criticism: The Purpose and Direction of Criticism**

**Saturday, 11 AM**

**Peter J. Heck (mod), Samuel R. Delany, Thomas A. Easton, Evelyn C. Leeper, Gordon Van Gelder**

Well, since fools rush in where angels fear to tread and all that, I was perfectly willing to answer the opening question: "What is the difference between reviews and criticism?" I said that criticism assumes the reader has read the book; reviews assume s/he hasn't. Now, I admitted even then that this was a very rough cut at an answer, and other people did offer variations or differing opinions. Delany quoted D. H. Lawrence: "The purpose of critics is to save authors from themselves." (I can't recall if this was in the specific context of criticism versus reviews, or just in general.)

We also discussed negative reviews, pro and con. I was in a unique position on the panel in that I could review what I chose--the rest had books assigned to them. So while they sometimes *had* to write a negative review, I had the option of just writing no review. I did say, however, that in my fields of (semi-)expertise (Sherlock Holmes and alternate histories) I did feel some obligation to review everything I ran across, if only to warn other aficionados against wasting their money.

The constraints we worked under also influenced our reviewing in other ways. Easton and Van Gelder

review for monthly magazines (*Analog* and *New York Review of Science Fiction* respectively), meaning a several-month lead time between when they write the review and when it appears. Delaney talked about reviewing for the *New York Times* (Sunday edition) and how it was more likely to affect sales because of its timeliness. I said that my reviews took not months or even days to appear, but hours. However, my lead time was greater--they all get review copies before publication, while in most cases I can't review a book until it's been published and I buy it.

In response to discussion about whether people read reviews for books they've already read (separate from the review versus criticism issue), Mark Leeper mentioned from the audience that he likes to put "information bombs" in his reviews, little facts that take on more meaning after the reader has read the book. For example, he included some information about the parallels between *The Godfather Part III* and *Cavalleria Rusticana* (which was used in *The Godfather Part III*) which was more meaningful to people who had seen the film and would suddenly become clear to others when they did see it.

Small press publishers in the audience talked about the problems they have. With such small press runs they can't afford to send out a lot of review copies, but then this means they won't get reviewed. Delaney suggested sending a copy to the *New York Times* as he says their method for selecting the books to be reviewed is the most likely to result in a small press item being chosen.

### **Alternate Histories: The Way We Weren't Saturday, 1 PM**

**Mark Olson (mod), Elizabeth Carey, Mark Keller, Evelyn C. Leeper**

This is starting to become one of the obligatory panels at science fiction conventions. (Well, at least they didn't have a Sherlock Holmes panel as well!) Keller talked about getting into alternate histories through his study of regular history--historians apparently write these things called "counter-factual speculations" for historical journals. They're alternate histories in which the historians change one variable and try to predict the outcome. For example, what if Julius Caesar had survived the assassination attempt? This sounds very familiar, right? The book Patricia Crone and M. Cook's *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* was mentioned, which I gather at least covers some possibilities for an alternate history of religion.

Keller (who by the way will be publishing an annotated bibliography of alternate histories late this year or early next) mentioned some recent "mainstream" alternate histories, including Oscar Lewis's *The Last Years* and George Bernau's *Promises to Keep* and *Candle in the Wind*.

One variation we touched upon, if only to distinguish it from "true" alternate history, was that of the "secret history," in which history turns out to be not what we had thought. An example might be that Hitler was really assassinated in 1933, and a substitute was put in his place, or that Elizabeth I was really a man, or whatever. The various Illuminati conspiracy novels would also fall into this category.

Another distinction we made was the "change-war" story versus the straight alternate history. While I (and the other panelists, as far as I could tell) accept both as alternate histories, there are some who don't, or at least want the distinction retained. "Change-war" stories assume time travel, and someone going back and changing the past. (I don't think they necessarily require two sides competing about how the past should be, even though the term "change-war" would seem to imply that.) Non-"change-war" stories just assume a different timeline arose naturally.

Someone asked about the competing theories that "The man makes history" and "History makes the man." Though much alternate history assumes the former, some have been written with the latter as a guiding principle. This led us into a discussion of chaos theory and Mark Leeper's contention that chaos theory says that even if Lincoln just sneezed in a different direction, things now would be *very* different. Olson said that chaos theory had caused a lot of ripples (so to speak) in science fiction and pointed out that Isaac Asimov's *Prelude to Foundation* attempted to reconcile psycho-history with chaos theory (not entirely successfully, to his mind).

The usual question of "Which are the best alternate histories?" arose. Answers included Ken Grimwood's *Replay*, John Brunner's *Times Without Number*, James Hogan's *Thrice Upon a Time*, and Keith Roberts's *Pavane*. If I were restricting my nominations to book-length works, I would also add Len Deighton's *SS-GB*; Harry Harrison's *A Transatlantic Tunnel, Hurrah!*; Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee*; Robert Sobel's *For Want of a Nail*; and Poul Anderson's "Time Patrol" stories. There are also a few anthologies edited by Gregory Benford worth investigating: *Hitler Victorious*, *What Might Have Been 1: Alternate Empires*, and *What Might Have Been 2: Alternate Heroes*. (He has another couple of volumes scheduled for the next year as well.) Philip Mackie wrote an excellent alternate history teleplay, "An Englishman's Castle," which occasionally shows up on PBS. In the short form, the top contender seemed to be H. Beam Piper's "And He Walked Around the Horses," though any attempt to list the best stories would result in a very long list indeed. The anthologies mentioned above at least give a good start.

Other books mentioned as being of interest were Graham Holderness's *Shakespeare's History*, a "counter-factual speculation" written as if everything Shakespeare wrote in his histories (and other plays?) was fact. (Or maybe it was an expose of how it wasn't--I wish my notes were better!) In this regard, Poul Anderson's *A Midsummer Tempest* was recommended as well. History books of use to alternate historians include Edward N. Luttwak's *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century A.D. to the Third*; William H. McNeill's *Pursuit of Power, Venice: The Hinge of Europe*, and *Plagues and Peoples* (and for that matter, anything else he wrote); and James Burke's *Connections*. In regard to the last mentioned, Keller said that though it provided a lot of ideas on how history might have been different, many were not viscerally exciting. Writing about how a slight change in farming technology made a difference in the settlement of Europe is not likely to arouse great interest, Leo Frankowski's "Cross-Time Engineer" series notwithstanding.

Someone said that they thought they had a great idea for an alternate history--what if the Vikings settled America? (Or rather, what if they settled it somewhat more successfully than they did?) But then he discovered this had been done already by John Maddox Roberts in *King of the Wood*. This led me to ask Keller what the most common change points were. The most common (in English-language science fiction, anyway) was "What if Germany (Japan) had won World War II?" (over a hundred that he found). The next most popular was "What if the South had won the Civil War?" (about eighty)--this shows the American influence for sure, as I doubt many of these were written by Britons or Australians. Third was "What if the Spanish Armada hadn't been defeated?" The most popular in French was "What if Napoleon had not been defeated?" which Keller said usually resulted in a better world than we have, while most American alternate histories show things as being worse. When someone in the audience asked why, Olson replied, "We look at this as the best of all possible worlds, but the French know it isn't, because most people speak English."

(Keller frequently referred to alternate histories as "uchronias," a good Greek term that maybe 10% of the audience understood.)

**The North Shall Rise Again: Alternate Civil Wars**  
**Saturday, 2 PM**  
**John Barnes (mod), Mark Keller, Michael F. Flynn**

Through the sort of scheduling cock-up that one does *not* expect to see at Boskone, this alternate history was scheduled back-to-back with the last one--in the other hotel! (Pity Mark Keller if no one else--he *had* to be on time.) Be that as it may, this was equally well-attended--I wonder what the overlap was? Keller started by mentioning that this was the second-most popular topic in English-language alternate histories, so it was reasonable to have such a panel. (And of course, all the recent interest in the subject stirred by the PBS series may have had some influence on the choice of the topic.) However, since historical opinion is that the only question about the outcome of the Civil War (or the War Between the States, if you prefer) is how long it would take for the North to win, and why it took as long as it did, the panel had to explain how a writer could postulate the South winning. (Only even worse Northern generals--and the panelists agreed this was hard to conceive of--would

have made the war last longer, and even then the North couldn't help but win by 1866 or 1867.) The only way the panelists could see to have the South win was by postulating some sort of massive outside intervention, though they had difficulty finding any that seemed likely given the actual world situation. Britain was unlikely to come in on the side of the South--they wanted a strong United States to promote the Monroe Doctrine and keep the other European powers from expanding their empires into the Western Hemisphere. France, in fact, did set up a protectorate in Mexico while the war was going on. After the war, we turned our attention to that area and France quickly withdrew. Still, the panelists thought this might be a fruitful area to work in for a believable alternate history.

As to why the South thought the British would support them, Keller said that the South thought Europe needed their cotton to keep their mills going. But France and England had both just discovered new sources: Egypt and India. Several possibilities for alternate histories were thrown out from the audience in response to this. What if the South spread the boll weevil to Egypt and India to destroy these sources? What if the South had shipped all their cotton to warehouses in England before the blockade so that they could sell it and get hard cash? What if the South had tried harder to hold on to New Orleans and the large banks that were there?

A discussion of battle techniques followed. There was not much alternate history content here. There was some discussion of how the Virginia was built from the Merrimac because that was the fastest way to build an iron-clad. This led to speculation about the outcome if the North had worked harder on capturing Virginia, both because that was the commercial and governmental center of the South and because of the Tredigger Iron Works, which were the South's only iron works. (One interesting fact: the South had experimented with "cotton-clad" ships, whose sides were covered with bales of cotton. While they did stop the bullets and shells from piercing the hull, the heat of the projectiles meant that after a while your ship would start to smolder!)

Much abuse was heaped upon General George McClellan (probably deserved). Speculation about how things would have been different were he out of the picture much earlier led only to a much faster Northern victory.

Other factors affecting the outcome were the constant flow of immigrants into the North, where if they joined the Army for two years they got "forty acres and a mule," as well as \$75 and citizenship. To starving Irish peasants, this was a pretty good deal. Even if they didn't join the Army, there were jobs. In the South, there were no jobs, and not much of a future if you joined the Army either. One person mentioned the theory that the Civil War was the last great battle between the Anglo-Saxons (North) and the Celts (South). This was laughed at by the panelists, especially in light of the large influx of Irish to the North during the war. Barnes later noted that our view of the South as someplace full of the Celtic heritage a la *Gone with the Wind* was almost totally inaccurate, and that our impressions all came from the movie version. "From *The Birth of a Nation* to *Gone with the Wind* is when the Old South was established," he explained. (For those not up on their history, that's 1915 to 1939.) And the reason all those Southern mansions look alike was that they were all built within a twenty-year or so period. There was no long tradition of huge plantations in the South; most of the farms were small and unimposing.

Another interesting fact brought out was who was really on which side. That is, the mountainous regions of the South in Tennessee and Arkansas, which were not cotton-growing areas, often supported the North and provided most of the backing for the Peace and Constitution Party. The mountainous areas of Virginia supported the North so much, in fact, that they broke away from Virginia and formed West Virginia, and Texas almost seceded from the South as well. Well, logic says if the Southern states could secede from the Union, why couldn't some of those states then secede from the Confederacy?

Trying (one suspects desperately) to get the panel back on track, Keller said there were really three directions a Civil War alternate history could take: no war at all, a Southern victory, or a shorter war leading to a Northern victory. (The latter would result in less destruction and disgrace of the South--

no Sherman's March, for example.) The most highly recommended alternate history in this area was Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee*. The worst were Terry Bisson's *Fire on the Mountain* (an opinion from an audience member), and Mark Keller's personal choice for worst alternate history ever (not just Civil War alternate history): John Jakes's *Black in Time*, which had, among other things, blacks driving black-and-white spotted cars with large curved horns in front which were called "Masai 6" cars, all as a result of a black time traveler trying to improve the position of blacks. Other lesser-known alternate histories of varying quality included James Thurber's "If Grant Had Been Drinking at Appomattox," Sir Winston Churchill's (yes, *that* Winston Churchill) "If Lee Had Not Won at Gettysburg," and Howard Waldrop and Stephen Utley's "Custer's Last Jump." In regard to the latter, Keller said it had zeppelins and after all, "If it's an alternate world it has to have zeppelins--that's rule one." Now there's an idea for an alternate history panel--"Alternate Histories with Zeppelins." This brought mention of "Quit Zoomin' Those Hands Through the Air, Boy" by Jack Finney, but that may have been zeppelin alternate history rather than Civil War alternate history.

One interesting alternate history (title and author not given) had as its focus a document that proved that the South had a legal right to secede, and attempts by competing time travelers to get or destroy this document. The consensus of the historians present was that the South did in fact have this right, but the North had the guns. The victors write the history books. Someone also pointed out that before the Civil War people would say, "The United States are ..." and only afterwards did it become "The United States is ...." (This was cribbed from the PBS "Civil War" series.)

### **Why Doesn't SF Fare Well on the Big Screen?**

**Saturday, 3 PM**

**David Kimmel (mod), Chris Claremont, David Harris, Mark R. Leeper**

Before starting on why SF doesn't fare well on the big screen (a question not unlike "have you stopped beating your wife?" in that it presupposes a previous question and answer), Kimmel put forward his nominations for best science fiction film of the 1980s: *Bladerunner* and *The Fly*. (I was a bit surprised at the omission of *Brazil*, but never got a chance to ask about it.) Claremont's response was that *Bladerunner* had "a background to die for and a foreground from hunger." Rather than argue this for the entire hour, they agreed to disagree.

The basic consensus of why science fiction films are rarely satisfying (which I think a better way to express the subject of the panel than the actual title) is that everything in Hollywood is done by committee these days, or at least by a lot of people: the producer has his concept; the director has his; the actors have theirs; the set designer, costume designer, and art director all get their chance to influence the film; and the editor gets one last shot at it. A science fiction story, on the other hand, is generally the product of a single author, possibly with some input from an editor. (If you don't buy the idea that *everyone* has some influence on a film, tell me who put the gay rights button on Meryl Streep's jacket in *Postcards from the Edge*? Was it Streep, or the costume designer, or the director, or someone else entirely? Whoever it was did something that helped define the character.) This whole argument is, of course, just the auteur theory recycled.

[Spoiler about *Total Recall* in this paragraph.] A debate on *Total Recall* followed, with Claremont claiming that the whole ending was scientific garbage, and someone else saying it was all part of the dream so of course it didn't have to be accurate. In defense of the latter position, Mark and I pointed out that when the technician removes the dream from the shelf in the early scene, he says, "Blue sky on Mars? That's new." So of course there's a blue sky on Mars at the end. The problem with all this is that you have to see the film several times (or know what to look or listen for) for the film to make sense, and this is as bad an idea on the part of the filmmaker as requiring that you read the book to have the film make sense--unless they issue you a copy of the book when you buy your ticket to the film. Someone (Harris?) said this points out another reason why films are less satisfying than books is that books are read at their own pace while films must be seen at the director's pace. Even if they aren't quite as convoluted, you still don't have a chance to say, "Let me hear that again" (especially necessary if the person next to you decides to cough at the instant of critical dialogue) or to stop and

think about what you're seeing or hearing.

Most science fiction films are action films. As Harris said, though, "It's possible to make a film about ideas--it's called a small film." And Claremont gave *Doctor Who* as an example of "really interesting sci-fi on a budget of, like, five bucks." Someone suggested Masterpiece Theatre as the place to dramatize science fiction books, leading Leeper to suggest "I, Atreides." He also pointed out that the BBC does some very good adaptations as mini-series: *The Invisible Man* and *The Day of the Triffids*. *Lathe of Heaven* was also recommended, but that never really caught the public's imagination. Another reason the title of this panel is inaccurate, by the way, is that it covered television as well as film, and most televisions are not the "big screen."

But action films sell. Kimmel quoted the old adage about how it's called "show business," not "show art" or "show idea." This is also presumably why they have novelizations of films that were made from perfectly good novels (or short stories) to begin with--they need something new (and written at a lower level than the original, one suspects). So we see novelizations of *The Man Who Would Be King*, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, *Total Recall*, and *Moonraker* (well, the last one had no connection between the film and the original book except the title, so I'll forgive them).

And, of course, since Hollywood wants to make money, everyone wants to be the "first to be second." So of course everyone copies whatever picture was the latest big success. This explains the current plethora of sequels, though as Bob Devney volunteered from the audience, "This never happens in literature ... sequels and such." (In case you couldn't tell, folks, this is irony, or as Steve Martin said in *Roxanne*, "Oh, Irony! We don't get that here. No, the last time we had irony was '82, when I was the sole practitioner of it and I got tired of being stared at.")

Only at the end of the panel did people bring up Japanese animated films ("Japanimation"). Unfortunately there was no time to discuss it, and it probably will end up getting a panel of its own at a future Boskone (though I suspect most of the Japanimation fans go to Arisia instead).

One topic not discussed directly was adapting literature to the screen versus writing original science fiction for the screen and what sorts of results one gets in each case. It could be that what works on paper doesn't work on screen and trying to adapt existing works of literature is not the optimal way to create good screen science fiction.

Kimmel, by the way, is the Boston correspondent for *Variety* as well as a science fiction fan, so he brought a new perspective to an otherwise over-exposed topic. One thing he mentioned was that whenever he wrote a review and said "SF" or "science fiction," it would get changed to "sci-fi." So don't blame him.

### **The Best SF and Fantasy of the 1980s Saturday, 5 PM**

**John R. Douglas (mod), Ellen Asher, Gregory Feeley, Fred Lerner, Michael Swanwick, Heather Wood**

Swanwick began by listing all the first novels of the 1980s (or rather, authors whose first novels appeared in the 1980s--it was left as an exercise for the reader to figure out the novel). Included were Clive Barker, David Brin, Robert L. Forward, John M. Ford, Barbara Hambly, Kim Stanley Robinson, Rudy Rucker, Lucius Shepard, and several others whose names I didn't write down fast enough.

Douglas asked the panelists to give their choices for best fantasy author of the 1980s and best science fiction author of the 1980s. The nominations were:

*Panelist*

*Fantasy*

*SF*



Asher	Robert Holdstock	Greg Bear
Douglas	Paul Hazel	Gene Wolfe
Feeley	John Crowley	Gene Wolfe
Lerner	John Maddox Roberts	S. M. Stirling & Janet Kagan
Swanwick	Lucius Shepard	Gene Wolfe & William Gibson
Wood	Terry Pratchett	David Brin

It was noted that all but one are male and all but one are American (and Pratchett was chosen by the one British member of the panel). "American" in this context seemed to mean "United States"; at least I don't think any of these authors are Canadian. Other British authors were mentioned in response: Geoff Ryman and Rachel Pollack in particular. But their works are much more available in Britain than in the United States, although Ryman's *Child Garden* was just published in a United States edition, and Pollack's *Unquenchable Fire* was finally sold to a United States publisher.

The panelists were then asked for what they considered the most neglected works or authors of the 1980s (presumably the most *undeservedly* neglected):

<i>Panelist</i>	<i>Response</i>
Asher	Joan Slonczewski's <i>Door into Ocean</i>
Feeley	Avram Davidson, Howard Waldrop, Carter Scholz's <i>Palimpsests</i>
Lerner	Barry Hughart, Viido Polikarpus and Tappan King's <i>Downtown</i>
Swanwick	Pat Cadigan, R. A. Lafferty, Paul Park
Wood	Emma Bull's <i>War for the Oaks</i> , David Palmer's <i>Emergence</i>

Lerner concurred on Lafferty and Palmer as well. Wood said she liked only the first edition of *Emergence*; the second had something tacked on to the end that she thought detracted from the book. Hughart has just had the third in his Master Li novels published (*Eight Skilled Gentlemen*).

Inexplicable successes was the next topic. Most panelists found themselves uncomfortable with this--they didn't like say negative things about other authors, and also pointed out that they could *explain* the success of many of the worst books, at least from a commercial standpoint. When pressed Asher named L. Ron Hubbard's *Mission Earth*, prompting another panelist to suggest the "Dead Authors Book Club." This is not simply books written by people who are now dead; it is books written by people *after* they are dead. To L. Ron Hubbard's dekolgy we can add V. C. Andrews's last two books; further suggestions are welcome. One panelist asked, "But can you get signed editions?"

One member of the panel said he thought John M. Ford was not exactly an inexplicable success; he thought that Ford tries hard for failure, but fails at not succeeding. For example, Ford wrote a poem for his Christmas card one year; it somehow got distributed and won the World Fantasy Award ("Winter Solstice, Cameron Station"). He writes "Star Trek" novels, and then they become accepted outside the usual "Star Trek" readership.

Authors considered to have "re-flowered" in 1980s were Isaac Asimov, Robert Silverberg, and Frederik Pohl. Feeley took exception to the latter, saying that Pohl had done twenty books in the 1980s, two each year like clockwork, but none of them achieved the greatness of his earlier works.

Mention was also made of Bradley Denton for *Wrack and Roll* (though personally I think he is unlikely to achieve wide popularity). Denton's second book, *Buddy Holly Is Alive and Well and Living on Ganymede*, is due out soon.

Dave Bara pointed out from the audience that he was surprised that no one had mentioned Dan Simmons. Feeley said that was because Simmons had really emerged in the 90s. This led to a long analysis of when exactly Simmons's novels came out, with the conclusion that since they were being voted on last year (1990), they had come out in the year before that (1989). But the fact that it was so close to the 90s probably resulted in the panel's oversight--when the chronology was straightened out,

they seemed to agree he was certainly one of the major writers to emerge in the 80s.

A brief stop in the Green Room resulted in my picking up the valuable information that brains should never be eaten with a spoon, only with a fork. If they can't be eaten with a fork, they're not fresh enough. (Also that Post-its are a valuable resource in planning out panels on a wallboard.)

At the Readercon party I found out why the Readercon anthology, *Monochrome*, is so much higher priced than NESFA Press offerings: *Monochrome* is a commercial venture rather than a non-profit one, and the publisher is still \$1000 in the hole. When the few hundred remaining copies sell (and there is a continuing sales level at least), he will eventually break even and maybe even make a little money.

Readercon, in spite of Eric Van's prior assurances to the contrary, is once again having the Kirk Poland contest. They are also planning a twenty-questions game about alternate worlds which Sue Anderson dubbed "What's My Time Line?"

**The Turn of the Century: SF and Fantasy in the Late 19th and Early 20th Century**  
**Saturday, 10 PM**  
**Mark R. Leeper (mod), John Barnes, Hal Clement, Don D'Amassa, Mark Keller**

Mark hadn't realized he was the moderator of this panel (to which he was a late addition) until we read the sign outside the room. Luckily the panelists had all done their homework and didn't need a lot of prepared questions to get going. D'Amassa even printed out a list of all his books written before 1925--but then forgot the list at home.

Keller said he got interested in this subject while studying the history of technology. Clement got interested in the subject because, although he was born after the period in question, a lot of what he read while growing up was written then, and some series started in the period were still in progress. (For purposes of the panel, the period was set at 1880 to 1914, the start of World War I.) One he listed in particular was Harry Collingwood's *Log of the Flying Fish*.

So who was writing and what was written during this period? Well, the obvious authors to note were Jules Verne and H. G. Wells. Another author, who has not maintained his popularity as well, was John Kendrick Bangs, whose works (*The Houseboat on the Styx*, *Return of the Houseboat*) inspired Philip Jose Farmer's "Riverworld" books decades later. George Allan England was cited; one of his books was *The Air Trust*, a book which supposed that a future government would find a way to put a tax on air. A local author, Edward Bellamy from Chicopee, wrote *Looking Backward: 2000-1889*. He also wrote a much less well-known sequel, *Equality*, which someone from the audience volunteered was available at Bryn Mawr Books in Cambridge (?). Lost-race tales began popular when stories of the discovery of the great cities of Zimbabwe and Machu Picchu came back. H. Rider Haggard was very active during this period, with tales of lost races such as *She* and *King Solomon's Mines*. Talbot Mundy, also discussed, actually wrote after the period under discussion.

John Jacob Astor wrote *A Journey in Other Worlds*. Contrary to what was said at the panel, he *did* go down on the Titanic. Speaking of the Titanic, someone in the audience mentioned a woman who predicted World War I and the sinking of the Titanic, or at least a ship very similar to the Titanic, in a novel called *Futility*. Walter Lord in the foreword to *A Night to Remember* lists the many amazing similarities between Morgan Robertson's ship *The Titan* and the real *Titanic*--even the fact that Robertson predicted an April sinking, and the real *Titanic* sank in April of 1912. (Well, it's probable that Robertson figured April is warm enough to start sailing and cold enough still to have icebergs.) M. P. Shiel wrote *The Purple Cloud*. Robert Chambers's *King in Yellow* with its futuristic city, Edwin L. Arnold's *Gulliver of Mars*, William Hope Hodgson's *House on the Borderland*, Rudyard Kipling's "Night Mail" and "Simple as ABC," Erskine Childers's *Riddle of the Sands*, and "The Bowman" (by some unnamed author) were all recommended.

Also named was George Griffith. Other authors cited whose works fell slightly after the period included Francis Stevens (a pen name for Gertrude Barrows Bennett) and Edgar Rice Burroughs. (Someone mentioned Russ Rocklynne, but he wrote years later.)

Just as today we have "techno-thrillers," they had them during the turn of the century. Of course, now those "future war" stories are all alternate histories. (It is actually a matter of debate as to whether books set in a future relative to their authorship become alternate histories when the time of their action arrives and the world doesn't match what is in the book. I will leave it to the reader to make his or her own decision. I suspect Keller will not be including these in his bibliography of alternate histories, however.) Famous techno-thrillers of the period that were mentioned included George Chesney's "Battle of Dorking," P. G. Wodehouse's "The Swoop," and Wells's own *World Set Free*.

A discussion of *War of the Worlds* revealed that Wells wrote this after hearing about a European assault on an aboriginal community in Australia. The parallel of a people attacked by weapons beyond their understanding is clear.

The claim was made that in general the quality of the plot and ideas in works written during this period was in inverse proportion to the quality of the writing, although of course there were exceptions.

Keller said that there was a lot of what we would call "New Age" stuff written in the 1890s, by H. P. Blavatsky and others. Of course, they thought of it as science. There were psychic detectives galore, the original ghostbusters! Even then, there were two paths: one school had the menace revealed as fake psychic phenomenon, the other found the menace to be truly supernatural. William Hope Hodgson straddled the fence by writing six stories: three with fake supernaturalism, three in which the supernatural elements are discovered to be real.

This led to mention of the practice of presenting fiction as fact. Leeper said that some of Jules Verne's works were published in newspapers as straight travelogues. It was pointed out that even today authors such as George Adamski and Whitley Strieber seem to be engaging in this practice. Keller recommended a book entitled *Travel Liars*, published by Dover, which consists of fictional travelogues presented as fact by con artists and other liars. (Either he got the title wrong, or it's out of print, as I couldn't find it listed in *Books in Print*.)

Barnes said his interest arose because of his interest in the theater of this period. Having discovered how to do great special effects, the theater then made sure they had science fiction or fantasy works to use them in. The Jacob's Ladder was first used in *The Vampire's Victim* (1887), which in spite of the title was a parody of *Frankenstein*.

Dime novels were also popular. Leeper even brought an example reprinted in a Dover book (*The Steam Man of the Prairie*). Other dime novels were *Round Trip to the Year 2000* and *Marooned in 1492*.

The Futurist Movement, primarily an artists' political movement, produced science fiction, or at least futuristic works, in Italy during the period of 1910 through 1930, but its influence never was very strongly felt in the United States. Fantasy was also popular in Italy at the time. In Germany, Carl May was writing; in Russia, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky.

What still holds up after all these years? Most of H. G. Wells, especially *The War of the Worlds*, Hodgson's *House on the Borderland*, and Jules Verne's works--assuming one finds a reasonably good modern translation and eschews the earlier, wretched translations that led to so much unwarranted criticism being heaped upon him.

I arrived late for this (probably no great loss). All of the clever double-entendres will fall flat on the printed page, so I will spare you them. To give you some idea of the level of humor, Laurie was referred to as the "female Mann," and upon seeing someone in the audience signaling a question, said, "Someone back there is going to save my life with their hand." This generated much laughter.

Someone said that the foot was a phallic symbol, because it goes right into the mouth. In talking about buttons, someone else said they were a phallic symbol: "See, they have a little prick right here" (pointing to the back). "No, Harlan's in California," said another person (who paid me one whole cent not to give their name here).

At one recent convention someone was going around with a peace-bonded wand--one with a condom over it. This led to discussion of fan[zine] reproduction, with the observation that corflu was *not* a good contraceptive.

Laurie said that one reason that the good stories were more recent is that many years ago, conventions were almost all men, to which Franklin predictably said, "That's okay."

Then of course there was the questions of why it's called "hard" and "soft" science fiction (or fantasy), what exactly *is* a gopher hole, and why there are no more sleazycons (described by one panelist as a "high-school make-out party with older, smellier fans").

This panel was concluded by a long (probably false) story about a big-name author getting in an argument with a fan. When arguing, this author purportedly has a tendency to lean forward, and some other fan supposedly came up behind him unseen and pretended to be sodomizing him. The story goes on to claim that other fans then got in line to take turns doing this bit of theatre (proof the story must be false--I've never seen fans able to make an orderly queue for anything!). Eventually the author turned around, saw what was happening, and got, not surprisingly, very irate. When the initial offending fan was pointed out to him, said author made a gun of his fingers, pointed it at the fan's crotch, and said, "Bang!" to which a passing fan said, "You killed it, you eat it." (Because I think the entire story belonged in the panel on fannish urban legends, I will not provide further identifying details, so don't ask. If you were actually present at the purported event, I would be curious to know what *really* happened.)

**Around the World in 80 (or more) Pages: How Writers Use Their Real Life Travel  
Sunday, 11 AM  
Greer Gilman (mod), Delia Sherman, Elyse Guttenberg**

For this panel, all three authors were talking more about how they used travel for their current book (Gilman's *Moonwise*; Guttenberg's *Sunder, Eclipse, and Seed*; and Sherman's *Through a Brazen Mirror*) than about travel and writing in general. All three also used Western cultures. *Moonwise* was set in an imaginary landscape based somewhat on Britain. *Through a Brazen Mirror* was set in a landscape "translated" from a duchy in the French Alps. *Sunder, Eclipse, and Seed* was set in a northern landscape which drew on Alaskan and Canadian regions for inspiration. And, of course, there is another approach, that of setting a novel in a historical or real landscape. This is probably more common in science fiction than in fantasy, though it is certainly possible there as well.

Though Sherman described her finding of the Alpine village "serendipity," it was clear that she had set out looking for it. The panelists on the whole did not address which came first, the idea or the landscape. They seemed, however, to travel to do research after the novel was in their minds, not to look at a landscape and say, "What a great setting for a story!" though Guttenberg allowed as how this sometimes happens. In general, it seemed to be thought that doing book research for books got authors interested in traveling rather than the other way around.

Travel was considered useful for getting all the details not available in books: settings, accents, and dialects. Sherman thought that travel would help authors avoid the all-too-common pitfall of writing

"novels set in suburban America with funny clothes." One of the panelists quoted Brian Aldiss (from *The Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*) as accusing fantasy writers of not having traveled and of writing generic landscapes. I put in a plug for maps in books, both as an aid to the reader and as a way to make sure the author has a definite landscape in mind. Gilman said the only problem with this was that in her book, part of the plot was that the landscape changed for different people at different times.

As far as book research, cultural anthropology books were considered the mainstay by all three panelists. Guttenberg (I believe) particularly mentioned *Reindeer Moon* by Elizabeth M. Thomas. Judith Tarr was cited as someone who not only does her research, but also includes a postscript telling where she strayed from history, or where she embellished it.

Guttenberg was asked about the possibility of her writing stories set more definitely in Alaska and less in a vague "northern climate." She answered a slightly different question of why she didn't retell traditional Alaskan stories: because they are "owned" by families, who also believe that the stories must be told correctly or disaster would befall them. Someone else brought up the book *The Beans of Egypt, Maine* in which Carolyn Chute poked fun at people in the town where she lived, and as a result was now *persona non grata* in the whole state of Maine.

### **African Cultures in Science Fiction**

**Sunday, 12 noon**

**Shariann Lewitt (mod), Esther Friesner, Evelyn C. Leeper, Mike Resnick**

Resnick's qualifications for this panel are clear to anyone who has read his recent works. Lewitt and Friesner both have studied and written stories set in the North African and Middle Eastern areas. My qualifications, as I told the audience, seemed to consist of the fact that I took a three-week vacation to Egypt, Kenya, and Tanzania. (But I didn't let that lack stop me from having opinions, as you might have guessed.)

Resnick said that much of his Africa-inspired work was based on alien cultures in contact, an old science fiction idea that one can see in reality in Africa. He compared the portrayals of how we would colonize the stars, usually fairly upbeat, with the reality of how we colonized Africa--not nearly as benign.

I talked about the geography of Africa, and how there really were three (perhaps even four) distinct areas one could examine. Northern Africa, with its strong Islamic influence and ages-old contact with Europe and Asia, is a very different setting than sub-Saharan Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa, in turn, can be subdivided into "middle Africa" and South Africa, since South Africa is different enough to warrant separate examination. And even "middle Africa" could be split into East Africa (with a German and British influence) and West Africa (with a French and Belgian influence). In this regard I said I frequently found myself at a loss, since when they were teaching me geography in school, it was right at the time when every week seemed to bring a name change for a country in Africa, so they never taught African geography, and my knowledge was limited to what I culled from my stamp collection. Even today, I do "double-thinks," translating "Zaire" into "Belgian Congo" and "Burkina Faso" into "Upper Volta" (assuming I can even remember the translations).

African settings go back quite a ways in science fiction (and fantasy), of course. Edgar Rice Burroughs with his Tarzan novels and H. Rider Haggard found it an excellent locale--vast areas of unexplored (by Europeans) territory made it the "Dark Continent" and allowed all sorts of lost-race and adventure stories to be set there. For a long time, though, Africa languished as a background for science fiction. The old stereotypes of Africans had fallen into disfavor (deservedly, one might add), and no one seemed to know what to replace them with. Egypt remained popular with stories dealing with lost secrets of magic, even up through Anne Rice's *Mummy* today. North Africa was used quite successfully by George Alec Effinger in *When Gravity Fails* and *Fire in the Sun*. (The third novel, *The Exile Kiss*, is due out very soon.) S. M. Stirling's trilogy of Draka stories (*Marching Through Georgia*, *Under the Yoke*, and *Stone Dogs*) fits more into the South Africa category. The middle

Africa category would include Resnick's "Kirinyaga" stories, "alternate Teddy" (Theodore Roosevelt) stories, and *Ivory*; Robert Silverberg's "Lion Time in Timbuctoo"; Howard Waldrop's "The Lions Are Asleep This Night"; and Mary Aldridge's "Indinkra Cloth."

Another category that probably should be at least mentioned is that of works set elsewhere but containing strong influences of African culture. Jorge Amado's works, parts of Umberto Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum*, and some of Octavia Butler's novels would fall into this category. (Her *Wild Seed* also takes place partially in Africa.) A good non-fiction background book in this area is *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, edited by Richard Price.

There was a lot of discussion of African history and politics, centering on the tribalism that is one of the main factors in politics, and one of the most over-looked or under-rated. Tribal languages are still prevalent, with official languages being either artificial creations (Swahili was invented by Arab slave traders) or "official" in name only, and not really used by most people. Resnick recommended the book Mort Rosenblum and Doug Williamson's *Squandering Eden: Africa at the Edge* as the best single source for background on Africa. (As luck would have it, this book just went out of print. Still, libraries would be likely have it.) Resnick pointed out that the most stable economy in Africa today seems to be Zimbabwe's--ironic since this country was under sanctions for years and could trade only with South Africa. As a result they had to become self-sufficient and when the sanctions were lifted, they were in much better economic shape than other countries with no sanctions. I observed that this threw a bit of a monkey-wrench into the arguments of those people who said we needed to give sanctions more time to work against Iraq.

In discussing Stirling's works, I mentioned that I found the first volume unpleasant and so did not read the second and third. (I also had some technical nits to pick, but that was not my primary reason.) The panelists were quick to emphasize that Stirling himself was not saying that a Draka domination of Africa or of the world was a good thing, and that one shouldn't attribute to authors the beliefs of their characters--not that I was doing that, but I had not specifically disavowed that. Resnick responded that he too found it necessary to remind people that just because the mundumugu in the story has certain beliefs does not mean that he (the author) has them as well, and in fact, that he is writing the stories in part to warn of the danger of such a philosophy as the mundumugu espouses.

### **Homophobia in SF**

**Sunday, 2 PM**

**Franklin Hummel (mod), Elisabeth Carey, Gottlieb Edison, Delia Sherman**

The first thing I wanted to hear was a clarification as to the subject matter of the panel: was it homophobia as shown by science fiction authors in their writings, or was it homophobia as shown by characters in science fiction, or was it homophobia as a theme in science fiction? It turned out, not unexpectedly, to be the first, though at one point there was some confusion about whether the phrase "a homophobic character" meant a character who is homophobic or a character written in a homophobic manner. The panelists' contention was that science fiction fandom (including authors) prides itself on being more open and accepting than society as a whole, but this is not always the reality. When the subject of lesbian and gay programming came up a few years ago, this panel topic was suggested and shelved as not a good foot to start off on, but the appearance of Orson Scott Card's article in *Sunstone* was what decided them on actually holding it. (The article is too long to reproduce here, and copyrighted anyway, but one of his contentions was that society should keep anti-gay laws on the books to discourage homosexuality, but that they should only be enforced selectively. No indication of who decided what laws should be enforced against whom was given. As a side note, I would mention that Dennis Prager published an entire issue of *Ultimate Issues* on Judaism and homosexuality in which he concluded that Judaism condemned homosexuality, but that he was *opposed* to laws outlawing it, and *in favor* of laws guaranteeing equal civil rights regardless of sexual orientation. But I digress.)

Books that set the panelists teeth on edge included several that had been otherwise widely praised. For

example, Sheri Tepper's *Gate to Women's Country* has as one of its premises that the tendency toward homosexuality has been bred out of the society. Card's novels were also mentioned, in particular *Songmaster* and *A Planet Called Treason*. Many other novels show the usual cliches and stereotypes. Unfortunately, the cliches and stereotypes are so strong that even when they are only part of the character (for example, Baron Harkonnen in *Dune*), that's all that comes across. On the positive side, Diane Duane's *So You Want to Be a Wizard* shows a favorable portrayal of two gay characters, though so subtly that she got them past not only the publishing house, but many readers.

There is a bibliography of science fiction with gay and lesbian characters, *Uranian Worlds* by Eric Garber and Lyn Paleo, now in its second edition. However, it fails to include at least one author whose recent works have had gay characters in a rather definite manner: Hilbert Schenck. His "Steam Bird" has an emphatically homophobic President and assistant (both, by the way, are clearly portrayed as morons). (This may be why I ought the panel could as easily be on homophobia as a theme as on homophobic portrayals.) Schenck's "Hurricane Claude" there are two gay lovers who are the heroes of the story, a plane named "Gay Enola," and a raving homophobe who, it turns out, is really repressing his own homosexual urges and comes around to right-thinking by the end of the story. And "A Down-Easter Storm" has a gay lawyer as one of the heroes.

I had to leave this panel early, so there were undoubtedly other books praised or damned after I left.

By the way, an example of what's wrong with fandom today is that before the panel started a fan was telling me how elitist NESFA was, and how they were putting on a convention no one wanted to go to (so why was he here?), and then when the subject of Card came up, he asked who Orson Scott Card was. Some people, we don't need.

### Miscellaneous

As with last year, the membership was under 1000. Attendance was (presumably) even lower. It seems as if the distance from Boston, coupled with the emergence of Arisia, has kept the size from increasing, or even returning to pre-Noreascon III levels.

Next year for Boskone 29 (February 14-16, 1992) the Guest of Honor is Jane Yolen.

Panel ideas for future Boskonos (or other conventions):

- | The Influence of Beowulf on Science Fiction
- | How to Pick a Reference Book (both literature reference and media reference)
- | Alternate Histories with Zeppelins
- | Words That Have No Rhymes--Or Do They? (humorous panel, as if you couldn't guess)
- | Fantasy Opera (or Science Fiction Opera) (the former would cover Wagner's "Ring"; the latter would include Blomdahl's *Aniara* and Todd Mackover's *Valis*)

---

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

[Return to Index](#)

[Other Conventions](#)

[FANAC Homepage](#)