

Boskone 31
A convention report by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Last year the drive was one hour longer due to the move from Springfield to Framingham, and three hours longer coming back, because there was a snowstorm added on as well. This year it was another hour longer going up because of wretched traffic, but only a half-hour longer coming back. (Going up we averaged 45 miles per hour, but never actually went 45 miles per hour--it was either 10 miles per hour or 70 miles per hour, and when it was 10, the heater was going full blast because the engine was over-heating.) Having everything in one hotel is nice, but is it worth it?

Three years ago, panelists registered in the regular registration area and were given their panelist information there. Two years ago, we had to go to the Green Room to get our panelist information, and this was in the other hotel, so this was a trifle inconvenient. Last year they returned to handing out the panelist information at the regular registration desk. This year--you guessed it: panelists had to go to the Green Room. I wish they would settle on one method.

Hotel

The Sheraton Tara was quite nice, and sufficient for the size that Boskone seems to have settled in to (700-900). Again, the parties seemed fairly empty.

Dealers Room

The Dealers Room is holding steady, with pretty much the same dealers (in the same places) as last year. There is a Border's Bookstore nearby which took advantage of having all these authors in Framingham to have autograph parties.

Art Show

I took a quick look through the art show, but little there interested me. I did get a copy of Wells's **FIRST MEN IN THE MOON** illustrated by Bob Eggleton at the Print Shop, and bid on a "book pin" (a small brooch that opened up to reveal a tiny story inside). But last-minute bidding on the pins (there were about a dozen different ones) was so spirited that I decided it was not worth it.

Programming

Again, it appears that the era of the "hard-science" Boskone is over. There are some science panels, but not as many as before. I attended fewer panels and other programming items than last year (twelve this year versus fourteen last year). Of course, I did not have all the Connie Willis panels I had last year, but in addition, the last two I attended this year were totally unplanned (see the notes for "Does It Have to Be a SpaceMAN?: Gender and Characterization" and "Deconstructing Tokyo: Godzilla as Metaphor, etc." for an explanation)

The First Night

I miss the Shirim Klezmer Orchestra! But we did have more opportunity to talk and mingle, which was somewhat hindered by the loud music the last couple of years. As I was having my second drink, Michael Flynn asked me to make sure there was an overhead projector for the "Turbulence and Psychohistory" panel. Never ask me to remember something at a party, especially if I'm having a drink! Naturally I forgot, but luckily the room was small enough that the attendees could see his viewgraphs when he held them up.

I have no idea what the con suite was like--I never got there.

Comic Books and Alternate History

Friday, 10 PM

Pam Fremon (mod), Michael Flynn, Will Shetterly

(One reason I was doing 70 miles an hour up was that I really wanted to make it in time for this panel (and was not quite sure how far Framingham was--it turns out it's just about 255 miles from work). Well, I made it.)

This was clearly a panel designed around one of the Guests of Honor. Shetterly is perhaps best known for his alternate history comic, **CAPTAIN CONFEDERACY** (Well, that's what he's best known for to me anyway.) **CAPTAIN CONFEDERACY** is set in a world where the South won the Civil War, and where a band of super-heroes exists. It ran sixteen issues altogether, twelve from SteelDragon Press and four from Marvel/Epic. (The twelve from SteelDragon can be gotten for \$10; the address is SteelDragon Press, P. O. Box 7253, Powderhorn Station, Minneapolis MN 55407.) Shetterly also said that there might be a continuation of **CAPTAIN CONFEDERACY** some day.

Shetterly began by saying that all fiction is alternate history (a claim my husband Mark has been making for years--after all, he says, Rhett Butler and Scarlett O'Hara did not really exist in our universe, right?). He added, however, that authors must be true to their own view of the world, and **CAPTAIN CONFEDERACY** was no doubt influenced by the fact that Shetterly grew up in the South. But the author being true to his or her view does not limit the field; as Shetterly said, there can be many alternate histories (in spite of the fact that people often assume that an alternate history is the definitive one rather than just another one). For example, Shetterly said that just because his CSA is grim does not mean that another CSA **has** to be grim. Flynn pointed out that authors also tend to write alternate histories in which "it comes out right," i.e., the way the author would have liked it. (Flynn noted that Harry

Turtledove's **GUNS OF THE SOUTH** got an award from descendents of Confederate veterans, which goes to show that people also like to read alternate histories in which "it comes out right." By the way, Turtledove has just finished co-authoring an alternate history with actor Richard Dreyfuss. Entitled **THE TWO GEORGES**, it is reportedly a police procedural in which the Thirteen Colonies made peace with Britain in 1779. [Thanks to Robert Schmunk for jogging my memory on this one.]

If Shetterly was influenced by his Southern background, Flynn was influenced by having early on read J. C. Squire's **IF IT HAD HAPPENED OTHERWISE: LAPSES INTO IMAGINARY HISTORY**, with its stories by Belloc, Chesterton, Churchill, and others; and "Sideways in Time" by Murray Leinster. In response to a question from me later, Shetterly said that he knew of many "what if the South won the Civil War" stories; he listed Ward Moore's **BRING THE JUBILEE**, Terry Bisson's **FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN**, Mackinlay Kantor's **IF THE SOUTH HAD WON THE CIVIL WAR**, David C. Poyer's **SHILOH PROJECT**, Leonard Skimin's **GRAY VICTORY**, Robert Stapp's **A More Perfect Union**, William Sanders's **WILD BLUE AND THE GRAY**, E. Ruffin's **ANTICIPATIONS OF THE FUTURE** (written in 1860, which I guess means it was not really an alternate history, but a straight extrapolation about the future), and something by Wilson. At the time I thought he meant Woodrow Wilson, but I cannot find anything by him; Shetterly may have been thinking of "If Lee Had not Won the Battle of Gettysburg" by Sir Winston Churchill.

Shetterly also talked about how one decides what would be different. Racism, he claims, is an effect of Southern pride, so one presumes if Southern pride had not been so damaged by the loss of the Civil War, then racism might not have arisen. He also thinks that had Lincoln lived, Southern pride after the war would not have been so undermined, thereby causing less racism in that scenario as well.

The panelists noted that writing an alternate history assumes readers know what the real history was. This of course brought to mind the story Connie Willis told last year about how at a discussion of her novel **LINCOLN'S DREAMS** one of the attendees asked how much of the Civil War material Willis had made up (none of it, it turns out). When pressed, the attendee said, "Well, for example, who's this Grant character?" (I note that in his latest alternate history sortie, Turtledove lists all the characters of **WORLDWAR: IN THE BALANCE** on the endpapers of the novel, and notes which were real and which are imaginary.)

Flynn noted in some context that "industrial-strength Nazis" as villains are gone, and someone pointed out that "Saturday Night Live" had done a skit in which Superman had landed in Germany instead of the United States and become Uberman.

Various alternate histories and turning points were of course mentioned. Someone asked what if the disease that killed off most of the indigenous American people when the Europeans invaded had worked in the other direction and diseases from the Americans had killed off most of the Europeans instead? The panelists observed that this was exactly what happened in Africa, where Europeans died in comparable proportions to the deaths of the population of the Americas, and the result was ultimately not much better for the Africans.

This somewhat hinted at what the panelists then explicitly observed: what alternate history readers enjoy has nothing to do with the plot. The background and other trappings far outweigh the actual events that may take place. For those who like reading alternate histories, the panelists therefore recommended a couple of non-alternate history books of interest: Josephine Tey's **DAUGHTER OF TIME** (a mystery novel in which a modern detective tries to figure out what really happened to the "two little princes in the Tower" during the time of Richard III) and Fletcher Pratt's **BATTLES THAT CHANGED HISTORY**. (Pratt's **BLUE STAR** and **THIRD KING** were cited as actual alternate histories, though.)

A variety of alternate history stories were recommended, sharing the characteristic that they are hard to find: John M. Ford's DRAGON WAITING (Shetterly said that Ford had a "Byzantine mind"), Saki's "When William Came," Robert Sobel's FOR WANT OF A NAIL: IF BURGOYNE HAD WON AT SARATOGA (written as an alternate history of the United States, complete with scholarly bibliography), and the 1974 NATIONAL LAMPOON complete with alternate history newspaper edition. (The Usenet alternate history bibliography lists February 1977 and February 1980 alternate history issues of NATIONAL LAMPOON, but nothing from 1974.)

But back to the specific topic (comic books and alternate history): when Shetterly began writing CAPTAIN CONFEDERACY, alternate history in comics was usually at the level of "What if Superman's father had put a banana in the ship instead of Superman?" (I do not know what the level of writing in alternate history comics is these days, but on Usenet in alt.history.what-if one still sees this sort of posting--though, mercifully, not very often.) And DC's "Legion of Superheroes" resurrected 1930s superheroes in an alternate world. But as Shetterly noted, there is a big difference between "what if?" and "gosh, what if?" and the comic books have tended towards the latter. However, superheroes are by definition in an alternate universe--one in which there are superheroes!--so you have to count them even if they're not as intellectually challenging. (I've seen alternate history novels in which Germany wins World War II where the premise seems to be the author's excuse to write violent semi-pornography, so I would not claim that books necessarily hold the moral or intellectual high ground here either.)

Comic books also often overtly serve the purposes of their publishers in terms of what in the movies would be "product placement"--using the publisher's other characters. So we get "What If?" and "Elseworlds" from DC, in which Batman becomes Green Lantern instead. (This does not even qualify as "gosh, what if?" to me, but more like "so what?") On the other hand, WATCHMEN is a genuine, honest-to-goodness alternate history.

Movies, on the other hand, tend to ignore alternate histories. Shetterly thinks this is because Hollywood creates the world anew in each movie, so alternate histories would be gilding the lily. (Actually, of course, that's a misquote on my part--it should be either "painting the lily" or "gilding refined gold." I like to throw these little education bits in my reports, even if no one else cares about them.) I should note that Hollywood, or rather the movie industry, has done a few alternate histories, of which the best known are IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE and "The City on the Edge of Forever" episode of the original "Star Trek." But I know of only about two dozen altogether, including foreign productions.

Shetterly closed by reminding people that he is running for governor of Minnesota. He listed as his main qualification, "I tell lies for a living and am up front about it."

Sources of Fear in Horror
Friday, 11 PM

David G. Hartwell (mod
) , Constance Hirsch, Lawrence Schimel, Darrell Schweitzer

The panelists started with some opening thoughts. Hirsch said that we read horror for the thrill (caused by the fear, I suppose). Schimel said that the most effective sources of horror are family relationships and abusive relationships. Hartwell claimed that horror "jumpstarts" the emotions. This was reminiscent of Tanith Lee's claim at another convention that the purpose of horror is to give us practice in being frightened. When I asked about this, Hirsch noted that this was not true, because in reading horror you could always stop if things got too scary. Schweitzer had a different view: "There are certain stories that are too dumb to be done straight." We're not afraid of where our teeth go, he said; it's not about *honest* emotion. He also said, "Horror is a series of recognizable tropes and

images" rather than a certain plot. He pointed out that if you take a horror story and set it in Atlantis, suddenly it becomes fantasy.

Someone cited Kathleen Koja's observation that horror is written for two audiences: teenage boys afraid of castration and women afraid of men. Even knowing this, panelists thought it was hard to write about fear on demand. Hartwell said that to get twenty-five stories for an anthology of horror stories he was putting together, he needed to ask two hundred fifty people.

There is also a difference between being disturbed by a novel and being scared. Hartwell said his rule of thumb was, "If a horror story is done with art, then it is as illuminating as any other art. If a horror story is done without art, then it is horror performed on me and I do not like it." Horror should be honest, not gimmicky. Hirsch feels that one purpose of horror is to let the reader vicariously triumph. There is a "right way" to read horror, according to Hartwell. You need to find the trope that jumpstarts your emotions, he said, and then read for those effects which are awesome (in the literal sense of creating fear and wonder).

There was brief note of the difference between supernatural and psychological horror. Five years ago the psychological horror was gaining, but now that is not as true. Horror is now found all over the bookstore: the mystery section, the fiction section, the suspense section, etc. ("Dark Suspense" is the marketing term for non-fantasy horror, if that helps.) For example, Susan Palwick's *FLYING IN PLACE* was marketed as a mainstream women's novel. Whether or not the supernatural is involved, Hartwell said, "horror is convincing the reader that something absurd in the real world is real for the time of the book." It's all about the "infusion of the irrational into the rational."

Schweitzer noted that people's reactions to horror change as they age/mature. When you're young (immature) you laugh at horror. Not laughing, and being disturbed by it, is a sign of maturity.

Someone quoted H. P. Lovecraft as saying, "The real connoisseurs of horror have to make do with parts of literary works," which Hartwell called "moments of discovery."

There was brief mention made of why there was so little horror poetry: it's hard to write it well. (Apropos of nothing here, someone noted that Gilbert & Sullivan rhyme with three or more syllables for comic effect. I think the drift was that rhyming things gives them a touch of humor--rhyming with multiple syllables multiplies the humor.)

Panelists recommended Roald Dahl, Shirley Jackson, John Collier, Tanith Lee, Gene Wolfe, Barry N. Malzberg, H. P. Lovecraft, and Clark Ashton Smith. (NESFA Press will be publishing Malzberg's *PASSAGE OF THE LIGHT*.) Schweitzer claimed that Jonathan Carroll's *LAND OF LAUGHS* is "the best horror novel of the last twenty-five years," and described it as what would have resulted if "Philip K. Dick and [someone else] conspired to write L. Frank Baum." *THE SCARF* by Robert Bloch was also heavily recommended, and Schweitzer said that *DARK DESCENT* edited by Hartwell was the standard anthology. Ramsey Campbell's *COUNT OF ELEVEN* was cited as a funny serial killer novel (if you're looking for that sort of thing). On the other hand, Hartwell said that Bradford Morrow and Patrick McGrath's *NEW GOTHIC* anthology was a "pile of shit."

When asked for the most horrific thing they had read recently, panelists listed M. R. James's work (Schweitzer), Billie Sue Mosiman's "No Restrictions" in *PULPHOUSE* #16 (Hirsch), W. Somerset Maugham's stories (Schimmel), and a Frank Robinson manuscript and a Gene Wolfe story (Hartwell). Also mentioned was Susan Wade's "White Rook, Black Pawn," which will appear in an Ellen Datlow anthology in 1996.

I note that there was not much discussion about the purported subject of the panel, the sources of fear in horror, other than the comment about family and abusive relationships.

Saturday Morning

Last year we could not go out for breakfast because our car battery was dead. This year we did go out, and I concluded that the hotel was better than Friendly's.

Immoral Fiction?

Saturday, 10 AM

Thomas A. Easton (mod), Michael F. Flynn, Patrick Nielsen Hayden, Melissa Scott, Jane Yolen

The panelists began by saying that they would be talking primarily about adult fiction, since children's fiction required a somewhat different approach.

Yolen opened by saying that the author has to be honest about his or her fiction (shades of what Will Shetterly said in the "Comic Books and Alternate History" panel and what David Hartwell said in the "Sources of Fear in Horror" panel). Nielsen Hayden added that fiction is a sort of experiment (where the author postulates a situation and then plays it out). The reader, however, may read things into novels that are not there.

Flynn summarized what most panelists (and probably most of the audience) believed: that when someone talks about "immoral fiction" he or she means "that which I do not believe" or "that which I disagree with." Examples of fiction which are often called immoral under this definition were given as Robert A. Heinlein's *STARSHIP TROOPERS*, William Golding's *Lord OF THE FLIES*, and all the works of John Norman.

Easton thought it was important to distinguish between morality and ethics, his distinction being that the former is grounded in religion and the latter is not. The other panelists, however, felt that this was merely a word game and wanted to consider the two as just different terms for the same concept.

Someone said that "moral fiction" is sometimes defined as fiction that concerns itself with the issues of right and wrong. But then if English were a logical language, "immoral fiction" would be fiction that does not concern itself with the issue of right and wrong. However, English is not a logical language. The latter sort of fiction might be termed "amoral fiction," but clearly "immoral fiction" means fiction that concerns itself with the issue of right and wrong, but comes up with the "wrong" answers. Scott later gave as an example of this novels written by African women which consider female "circumcision" a good thing.

Nielsen Hayden said that one thing to remember in all this is that science fiction is a didactic form; Yolen responded by saying that all fiction is inherently didactic. Nielsen Hayden agreed that might be true, but still felt that science fiction was more didactic than realistic fiction. Easton pointed out that because science fiction relied on hypothetical scenarios ("what if?"), it was easier for it to break tabus than for realistic fiction to do so. But was doing so immoral? Consider the film *THE PROGRAM*, which had a scene of students lying down on the center line of a road. After someone who had seen the film did this--and was killed--Touchstone removed that scene from all prints. Was the film (in legal terms) an "attractive nuisance"? (The classic "attractive nuisance" is a backyard swimming pool. The owners are supposed to *know* that neighborhood kids will be attracted to it and put a locked fence around it.) By the way, the audience seemed to feel the action in the film was less an "attractive nuisance" and more a case of "evolution in action." My example of this would be the Bible: is Christianity (or God) responsible for the misuse and misinterpretation of the Bible? If Christians claim not, then it hardly seems fair for them then to attack other authors for the misuse of *their* works.

Nielsen Hayden observed that this--and much of the criticism of fiction as immoral--seemed to assume that authors have some power to change society. "If we really did had the power to change society by our writing, we'd use it in a much more focused way," he said.

Yolen said that what she thought of as immoral fiction was fiction that was slickly sentimental and manipulative, such as Robert James Waller's BRIDGES OF MADISON COUNTY, David Eastman's VeLVETEEN RABBIT, and Shel Silverstein's GIVING TREE. As Yolen said, "It's easy to make a reader cry, but harder to make a reader think." "Comfy books" are okay, she continued, but they should not be considered on the same level as more thought-provoking works. Easton tried to rephrase this as, "It's the excess that makes them immoral," but with that definition I think you have the problem that you cannot say that a book is *inherently* immoral--and I suspect that there are books that people would say are inherently immoral.

Flynn noted, "We seem to be saying that moral books question rather than affirm," and in science fiction it is difficult to affirm because science fiction is a questioning ("what if?" again) genre. And what disturbs people is not asking the questions, it's the answers that are arrived at.

Nielsen Hayden did say that wrong-headed writers have a purpose: they are useful to argue with. They also give one the experience of being "seduced by garbage" and teach one to read critically. Of course, this process takes place only after you realize that what you had believed is in fact garbage, and this may take time, but as you grow up you often change your mind about books you read earlier in life. The examples he gave of this were Robert A. Heinlein and Ayn Rand.

Talking about children's books, someone in the audience said that she often has parents ask for a recommendation, but then they add, "I don't want my child disturbed." (Of course, this may just mean "please don't pick a book that will give my three-year-old nightmares.")

The panelists also mentioned John Gardner's ON MORAL FICTION.

Neglected SF and Fantasy Films
Saturday, 12 noon
Daniel Kimmel (mod), W. Michael Henigan, Mark R. Leeper

(I had wanted to see the "Catholicism and Science Fiction" panel (held somewhat ironically in the King Henry room), but loyalty demanded I attend this one. Henigan and Kimmel were both wearing SF-Lovers Digest T-shirts, but I was wearing ours instead of Mark wearing it. Moderators should let people know what the dress code is. :-)

What can one say about a panel on neglected films where panelists volunteer such "neglected" films as FORBIDDEN PLANET?

Well, ARRGHH! is about the only comment that comes to mind.

It started off well enough, with panelists noting that many factors lead to films being neglected: being in black and white, having no special effects, getting bad reviews, and so on. Then Kimmel listed some films that he thought were unfairly neglected: CONEHEADS, HEARTBEEPS, INNER SPACE, and QUINTET. All, you will note, are relatively recent (the oldest, QUINTET, is from 1979). Leeper's films, on the other hand, were older: THE MIND BENDERS, UNEARTHLY STRANGER, DARK INTRUDER, and QUEST FOR LOVE. Henigan listed LOGAN'S RUN, SOYLENT GREEN, and FAHRENHEIT 451.

Admittedly, the panelists did start moving backward in time a bit, naming CREATION OF THE HUMANOIDS, DRAGONSLAYER, DUNE (this is a neglected film? Badly thought of maybe, but hardly neglected), I MARRIED A MONSTER FROM OUTER SPACE, LIFEFORCE, PHASE IV, SPACED INVADERS, STRANGE INVADERS, THE TWONKY, and VIDEODROME. Other films mentioned included YEUX SANS VISAGE, CARNIVAL OF SOULS, DELICATESSEN, THE END OF AUGUST IN THE HOTEL OZONE, THE DYBBUK, FANTASTIC PLANET, THE LATHE OF HEAVEN, THE MAN WHO LAUGHS, RETURN TO OZ, SECONDS, SOMETHING

WICKED THIS WAY COMES, and something called BERNARD AND GENIE (sp?) from the Arts & Entertainment Network.

Kimmel also mentioned ALTERED STATES, which Leeper noted had opened the same weekend as SCANNERS and was eclipsed by that film.

Leeper provided a handout of his list of "neglected films," with commentary; it is attached as an appendix to this report.

Turbulence and Psychohistory

Saturday, 1 PM

Evelyn C. Leeper (mod), Michael F. Flynn, Robert Glaub, Mark Keller, Andrew Nisbet, Mark Olson

(Thanks to Mark Leeper for taking copious notes at this panel.)

The panelists began by introducing themselves (before I arrived, because I managed to get lost finding the room--my own personal turbulence, I guess). Flynn said that he had written a novel about psychohistory, IN THE COUNTRY OF THE BLIND. Robert Glaub works for the Department of Defense and is an amateur historian. Mark Keller is a well-known alternate history buff. Mark Olson started with alternate history and went on to become interested in real history. And I got to do something that I have complained for years about others doing--promote a published work of mine, in this case an article in the first issue of ALTERNATE WORLDS. So I guess I should complain about myself. Take it as read.

I began by couching the panel's topic in terms of chaos theory. If chaos theory is correct, and very small changes in initial conditions can effect enormous changes in results, then how is the prediction of the future affected, or the prediction of what might have happened if something had gone differently?

Nesbit said that the function of history is to present the past, not to predict the future, and that psychohistory has little to do with history. Olson said that sounded like what astronomers used to say, that we can never find out the makeup of the stars, so it was pointless to speculate. Should our view of history be based on whether we have the means to determine it? The Bernoullis applied probability theory to history; should we? Flynn said that most people trained in history are not trained in mathematics and statistics, so trying to apply those to history is something few experts can do. (And then a few minutes later proceeded to do so in great detail.) Keller felt that prediction was not unreasonable, and that we could use the lessons of history. Everyone knows of Santayana's statement that "those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it" (though I cannot find a source for this citation), but Keller quoted Kliuchevsky as saying, "History doesn't teach us anything, but it punishes those who don't learn the lessons." (Of course, Hegel said, "What experience and history teach is this--that people and governments never have learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it" [introduction, PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY].)

Flynn cited the science of cliometrics (after Clio, the Muse of History), which claims that there are laws in the way society works. Until cliometrics was discovered (or invented, depending on your point of view), human society was considered an invention of the gods. We still question, however, whether human society is somehow "hard-wired" into our brains or not.

Regarding predicting the future, Ben Yalow (in the audience) said that a while back someone was predicting how the Supreme Court would rule on various issues. Keller noted that was only predicting what nine people would decide and was not that difficult, given their past decision history. The Germans, for example, had a big file on Patton in an attempt to predict his actions. Nesbit said that what worried him was that examples of psychohistory were fallacious and started to explain

why, and then it became clear that I had failed in a primary task of a moderator: I had not had us define our terms. Most of us were using Asimov's definition of psychohistory, involving predicting the course of the future based on the idea that, while the behavior of individuals cannot be predicted, the behavior of large groups of individuals can. (Asimov got this idea by analogy from the action of gas molecules.) But Nesbit was interpreting psychohistory as being about applying psychology and psychoanalysis to individuals to predict their actions. Having cleared up this confusion, and established that we would be using the Asimovian concept, we proceeded.

And where we proceeded was to cycles. Flynn first mentioned the concept, and after responding to an audience member who thought C. Northcote Parkinson was the greatest thinker of the West and that Parkinson had said that there was a rhythm of history in which China has a three-hundred-year cycle, Flynn produced dozens of viewgraphs showing the various cycles of history that he (and others) had discovered.

Flynn began by discussing correlations. For example, there is a 95% correlation between the percentage of women working and the percentage of imported automobiles versus the domestic market. The conclusion one might come to, therefore, is that to reduce foreign trade one should get women back into the kitchen. But *any8 two increasing trends will correlate (and discounting the "Rosie the Riveter" bump in 1944, the working-women trend has been an increasing one all this century).

The first cycle Flynn showed on a viewgraph was the cycle of the number of slave revolts and race riots, starting with a slave revolt in 1837. This is stable with occasional spikes, the spikes occurring at regular intervals about two generations apart. ("Be out of town in 2010," was his advice.)

Flynn noted that, oddly enough, random processes produce predictable patterns. Trends and cycles that Flynn discussed were the number of wars per decade (random), the number of homicides versus gun control, and the number of children per family versus family income (as people get richer, they have fewer children, but there was a drop in 1919 and a post-World War II baby boom, as well as another baby boom in the 1980s). And often we do not realize that we have been in an atypical period. If we look at unemployment over a long period of time, we discover that median unemployment of 5% is normal. It's just that we were in a boom time from World War II and the Cold War and did not realize that it was not going to last. Sometimes a change in the process can change a trend. For example, business failures dropped after the Great Depression, but that was because not because the economics had gotten so much better, but that laws made it harder to go out of business.

On a depressing note, Flynn showed the graph for the money the United States collects, as a percentage of the GNP. In the 1940s, it starts going up, not in an exponential curve, but a super-exponential one!

As the panelists noted, this cyclic nature of history does not really help the predictor. One can predict approximately how many coups there will be in the world in a decade, for example, but this does not help predict that there will be a coup in Urago on May 17 of next year. (Which of course means that Hari Seldon's right-on-the-date predictions were pure fiction.) You can say that some areas of the country are prone to thunderstorms, but you cannot say when there will be one. Nesbit said that some people may think that all of human behavior can be predicted with a straight edge and semi-log paper, but it's more complex than that. Even the motion of the planets is a chaotic system, and while it can be predicted in the short term, the longer the period, the less accurate the predictions become.

And even cycles can be perturbed (as has already been noted). Nesbit cited a power plant whose proponents said that it would meet the growing energy needs of the area. But after it was built, the demand for energy either went down, or did not go up as fast as predicted. However, the reason for this was that the cost of building the plant had been so high as to raise the cost of electricity, and that

made people cut back on their usage! Another example was the number of suicides by gas in Britain. At some point it was made more difficult to commit suicide by gas (I forget how) and so that trend changed. (But possibly other types of suicides went up.) Flynn said that science is deciding what produces trend lines and whether it can be depended on.

Returning to the predictive powers of historians, Keller claimed that many people say the future was predicted in Revelation, Nostradamus, and Cayce. I noted that the "predictions" all seemed to have been noticed only after the fact, and that no one could figure out what was meant before something happened. I also said that while it is easy to explain why things happened in the past and make it at least plausible, when people turn these theories to the future, they do not seem to work. For example, Paul Kennedy explained at great length why countries rose and fell in *THE RISE AND FALL OF THE GREAT POWERS*, but then blew it all by claiming (in the late 1980s) that Germany would never re-unite, and explaining why. (Nesbit responded that Kennedy's explanations of history were not entirely convincing, and claimed that Kennedy had said that the rise of Bohemia was due to brass mines there.)

Olson asked, "If you had a time machine, could you make a change?" Well, of course you could (I pointed out you could kill the Beatles, which would certainly be *a* change), so Olson clarified that he was looking for whether one could change history *effectively*. Ben Yalow (in the audience) thought that just occasionally you could catch the cusp and do so. Olson replied that he did not believe in cusps, because any small change changes who gets born. (In other words, he supports the "Great Man" theory rather than the "Tide of History" theory.) Olson claimed that the change in who is born would be the same as replacing people by fraternal twins, though why he chooses fraternal twins instead of ordinary siblings is not clear to me. Yalow said that meant that Olson was claiming you could change history, to which Olson replied that yes, he could *change* history, but he could not predict (or control) the direction the new history would take. Glaub also backed the "Great Man" theory. Keller said the trick was in knowing what the critical changes are. Flynn said that no matter what random events are changed, certain results will occur (i.e., he backs the "Tide of History" theory). He used the analogy of a fern leaf, where there are alternate branchings, but they all tend to go in the same direction. Nesbit did not think he could manipulate history effectively, but thought it would be interesting to experiment and see what would happen if things were changed. (I had the same feeling this last election. I would be curious to know what would have happened if Perot had been elected, but not curious enough to commit myself to that future!) By repeating the experiment over and over, one might detect patterns. Olson somewhat humorously asked Nesbit how he would get informed consent from his experimental subjects. Flynn said that the problem with all this is that all you can do is fiddle with epiphenomena--individual events--while factors of the population as a whole are hard to change. How can you change the literacy rate, for example? You could sink Columbus, but someone else would have made that trip--the Americas are just too close to Europe to avoid being "discovered."

In regards to all this, Olson recommended a new book called *TIME MACHINES: TIME TRAVEL IN PHYSICS, METAPHYSICS, & SCIENCE FICTION* by Paul J. Nahin. And the book that Flynn used for many of his viewgraphs, and has quoted on many other alternate history panels, is *CYCLES, THE SCIENCE OF PREDICTION* by Edward R. Dewey and Edwin F. Dakin, which in 1947 predicted the economic cycles that we seem to be living through: a big recession in the early 1980s, another smaller one in the early 1990s, an upturn in January 1993, and a big upturn in 2006. (This is supposedly still in print from the Foundation for the Study of Cycles, 1964, 255pp, \$15.) (Regarding the economic cycles, Olson said, "Even if I believed history was mechanical, I would be skeptical." The charts were too accurate; you would not expect that sort of accuracy, he said. And books keep predicting that there is a recession coming: there has been one predicted for just about every year in the last couple of decades, and the year 2000 is particularly popular for all these sort of predictions. Of course, my feeling is that predicting all sorts of things for the year 2000 may be a self-fulfilling prophecy. If people expect some sort of disaster, their actions may cause one.)

Creating an Internally Consistent Religion

Saturday, 3 PM
David A. Smith (mod), James Patrick Kelly, Rosemary Kirstein

In the usual introductions, Kelly said that he had written PLANET OF WHISPERS and LOOK INTO THE SUN (based on Julian Jaynes's ORIGIN OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE BREAKDOWN OF THE BICAMERAL MIND).

The panelists started out by saying they were not going to define religion. (Darn!) So they began by asking what it means for a religion to be inconsistent. Well, one answer would be that it says one thing and does another, though no examples were given. Also, they said, reality can make a religion inconsistent. I do not know if by this they were referring to the sort of problem that strict Biblical fundamentalists have with a heliocentric solar system, or what. (Later, the example was given of the Boxer Rebellion, in which warriors were told that they were invincible. The problem, as someone expressed it, was that the bullets did not believe this.) Another idea of an inconsistent religion might be one in which on the one hand there is a command to be fruitful and multiply, while on the other hand, sex is taught as something to be avoided.

Someone listed the five branches of philosophy at this point:

- | logic--provides the rational basis for philosophical discussion
- | epistemology--theory of knowledge
- | metaphysics or ontology--study of nature of reality
- | ethics--study of what is good
- | aesthetics--study of what is beautiful

It was not clear what this had to do with the question at hand, but it was educational enough that I decided to include it.

The discussion moved to examining the nature of consciousness. Someone felt that consciousness was connected to the idea of a personal god that speaks to one.

As to why to create a religion at all, the panelists said that it was one way to motivate a character. But they warned about getting too specific too quickly, which may be why most fictional religions are not inconsistent--there is not enough there to make them inconsistent.

As an example of a fairly completely fleshed-out religion (as fictional ones go), someone gave the example of the religion in Frank Herbert's DUNE. Harry Turtledove has the premise that all religions are true in his "Visdessos" series, and also in THE CASE OF THE TOXIC SPELL DUMP, which I would think would lead to inconsistencies if two different religions claim that they are each the only way to salvation.

Someone asked if humans need religion (here defined as a belief in something beyond oneself). Many people seemed to agree that there could be an ethical content without spiritual motivation (though the Boy Scouts of America seem to disagree). And there is also a distinction between "hard" religion and "soft" religion.

Books mentioned that used religion as a major focus included Walter M. Miller's CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ (a pre-Vatican-II, post-nuclear Catholicism); Robert A. Heinlein's UNIVERSE; Fritz Leiber's GATHER, DARKNESS; James Blish's CASE OF CONSCIENCE and BLACK EASTER; Kurt Vonnegut's CAT'S CRADLE; and the work of L. Ron Hubbard. The latter was in response to someone who said that in novels, you know the made-up religion is false so you do not believe it. This gave rise to the question of whether an author could create a religion that people will believe in (or at least want to). And what people want to believe in can vary widely--someone claimed that the Inuit often find descriptions of Hell inviting! Heinlein's STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND was

given as an example of a religion that people did want to believe in, though whether it actually "worked" was unclear. And Heinlein of course reminds us that authors may also create religions to "prove" their ideas. Early Roger Zelazny, according to some, did this as well.

A religion must also be economically viable as well as internally consistent. For example, if a religion demands a virgin sacrifice every day, there better be a *large* supply of virgins handy. (One of the reasons the Spanish were able to conquer the Aztecs was that all the neighboring tribes helped fight the Aztecs, who had been raiding them to get enough victims for their sacrifices.)

Autographing
Saturday, 4:30 PM
Emma Bull

Luck of Leeper states that if I bring books by two authors to be autographed, at least one will not be at the convention. So I got my WAR FOR THE OAKS autographed by Emma Bull, but Kara Dalkey was not there to autograph THE NIGHTINGALE.

Parties

I dropped by the Readercon party to buy my supporting membership and the "Boston in 2001" party to find out what was going on. Not much was happening either place, or at most of the other parties (maybe I was just early), so I went back to the room and crashed. Last year I had attended the "Boston in 1998" party and my feeling had been that there was no really good choice for 1998, because Niagara Falls and Boston probably did not have the facilities/hotels needed, and the Baltimore people were concentrating too much on offering rum drinks and not enough on content or planning. The latter seems to have improved (I think someone told them they had to *show* that their act was together, not just have it secretly together), and they seem to be the front-runner. (I'm saving my Boston vote for 2001, since if it's in Boston in 1998, it cannot be in Boston in 2001.)

Origami
Sunday, 10 AM
Mark R. Leeper (mod)

I did not attend this, but saw it while I was cruising the art show. It seemed well-attended, though Mark mentioned that he was not happy about having the workshop shut down after only one hour. Since teaching origami takes a while, it would have been better to have it somewhere where they could have gone two hours.

The Forgotten Fantasts: Swann, Warner, and others
Sunday, 11 AM
Greer Gilman, Nancy C. Hanger, Don Keller

This was described as an "advocacy" panel. Much of it consisted of the panelists either listing authors they recommended, or actually reading excerpts from these authors' works. But other interesting tidbits were revealed. For example, Keller mentioned that William Morris invented the fantasy novel writing pastiches of medieval romances.

Gilman started by reading from Sylvia Townsend Warner's LOLLY WILLOWES (which she mentioned had been the very first Book-of-the-Month Club selection). She also recommended Warner's KINGDOMS OF ELFIN and CAT'S CRADLE, and Rachel Ferguson's THE BRONTES WENT TO WOOLWORTH'S (recently reprinted by Virago Press), which she described as "the urban fantasy of its time." (The Library of Congress, by the way, does not list the title CAT'S CRADLE for Warner. However, it also does not list Hope Mirrlees's LUD-IN- THE-MIST, which I know exists, so do not take this as gospel.)

George MacDonald was also recommended. His works are hard to find, but the panelists recommended you try Christian publishers. The edition of his works someone had was from the Ballantine "Adult Fantasy" series, which led people to list all the other authors published in that series as well. (There were about sixty books in the series; no, I cannot list them all!) MacDonald's were "dream country" rather than "somewhere else," a distinction that turns out to be of some interest in analyzing fantasy. MacDonald was described as a Christian theologian rather than as a Christian apologist (a term usually applied to C. S. Lewis).

A lot was said about Charles Williams, including that he could also be considered a writer of urban fantasy. Someone said they fell in love with his work when they read the first sentence of WAR IN HEAVEN: "The telephone was ringing wildly but there was no one to answer it except the corpse lying under the desk."

Hope Mirreles was called a "minor Bloomsburyite."

Karen Michalson's study VICTORIAN FANTASY LITERATURE was recommended. It explains, among other things, why fantasists were forgotten. (It has to do with political heterodoxy, and also with the fact that they wrote with no marketing constraints.) A lot of literary terms and references were thrown around, which I did not note down.

Other recommendations included EARTHFASTS and THE GRASS ROPE by William Mayne (I could not find a listing for the latter in the Library of Congress); TRAVELLER IN TIME by Alison Utley; someone's RACHEL AND THE SEVEN WONDERS (again, I could not find a listing); THE ABANDONED, THE MAN WHO WAS MAGIC, and MANXMOUSE by Paul Gallico; LADY FERRY by Sarah Orne Jewett (I found lots of listings for her, but no book of this title); and THE SHERWOOD RING and THE PERILOUS GARD by Elizabeth Marie Pope.

The City and The Story

Sunday, 12 noon

Moshe Feder (mod), Emma Bull, Greer Gilman, Steve Popkes, Madeleine Robins

Most of the panelists (at least the authors) had written urban fantasies, but Gilman described herself as the "token pastoralist" on the panel, since none of her work is set in cities. (Apparently the idea of "the City and the *Science Fiction* Story" was not going to be discussed.)

The obvious first question (which was also the actual first question) is, "Are cities good places for fantasy?" The panelists felt that they were, because the density of people in cities provides a lot of opportunity. They also note that Teresa Nielsen Hayden claimed there were two different scenarios for cities in fantasy (or science fiction): the City of Tomorrow, and the City of Dreadful Night. According to someone on the panel, Nielsen Hayden made the distinction by saying, "The City of Tomorrow is full of hope but has no sex and no one takes out the garbage," while the City of Dreadful Night may be more depressing but is also more realistic.

The wide opportunity for characters is enhanced by the fact that "being born in New York City doesn't make you a New Yorker" (as one panelists noted). "Some people are born to live in Cleveland." Other panelists compared this lack of identification with the city of one's birth to some people's lack of identification with the gender of their birth.

The whole question of the "city and the story" made the panelists ask if there were stories in which the setting was paramount, or at least more important than the characters. Bull said that people respond to their environment, but that the people (characters) are paramount. Gilman disagreed, at least mildly, by citing Joseph Conrad as an author whose settings are very important, perhaps more important than his characters. Someone responded that Conrad's settings *are* his characters. Bull agreed that settings could replace some characters; she said that Lankhmar would need at least

eighteen characters to replace it as a setting.

People agreed that science fiction uses settings more than mainstream fiction does. Some examples of setting-based mainstream fiction given were John Dos Passos's USA, Toni Morrison's BELOVED, Peter Matthiessen's FAR TORTUGA, Thornton Wilder's BRIDGES OF SAN LUIS REY, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE, and most of Charles Dickens's works. Science fiction works that are setting-based include John Stith's MANHATTAN TRANSFER, Samuel Delany's DHALGREN, Ursula K. LeGuin's LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS, Brian Aldiss's MALACIA TAPESTRY, Robert Sheckley's "Street of Dreams, Feet of Clay," A. J. Deutsch's "Subway Named Moebius," and Thea von Harbou's METROPOLIS. One book mentioned as being an interesting urban fantasy was Rachel Pollack's UNQUENCHABLE FIRE, in which magic devices are bought at the local K-Mart.

Has the city, then, replaced the island in literature as a microcosm? It has its own self-imposed isolation. (The film PROSPERO'S BOOKS is an urban landscape, even though everything takes place indoors.) Neighborhoods in the city can recreate the village, and parts outside the neighborhood can appear to be the dark wood (which panelists had agreed *had* been replaced by the city). And since people in cities ignore a lot of things, fantasy can occur unnoticed. Some people on the panel claimed this image of city people ignoring their surroundings was not a true image of city people, but the fate Kitty Genovese reminds us that it is at least partly true.

I asked if authors write about cities they have not visited as well as cities they are familiar with. Then I rephrased it as, well, yes, of course they do sometimes, but what are the differences? Robins said that she used the money from her first book set in London to make her first visit to London, but the question got dropped fairly fast. Bull did say that the Plaza of the Three Cultures in Mexico City was her most science-fictional experience. There a statue there which is remaining at the same level while the plaza (and the city) around it are sinking, so gradually more and more steps are added up to the statue. Robins said her most science-fictional experience was going to the World's Fair in New York after it was closed and seeing what looked like a post-holocaust world around her. (Someone asked her which World's Fair, to which Bull responded that Robins "has this oil painting in her attic....")

As far as writing stories in different cities, Bull said that she would like to spread out, and perhaps set her next story in St. Paul (especially after how she treated it in WAR FOR THE OAKS). She also wanted to set a story in Taxco, Mexico. Popkes wanted to set a story in Berlin, Gilman in Whitby (used in Bram Stoker's DRACULA), and Robins in Florence, Italy; or Los Angeles.

Gilman pointed out that even her pastoral settings are not natural. Moors are made by burning forests and will return to forest unless they are maintained. So even landscapes are not untouched by humans and civilization. Popkes saw this, and cities, as a metaphor of humans changing the earth. He also said that cities have one of everything, and described walking down Park Avenue last December and passing a man carrying a handful of whips and calling out, "Whips for sale! Whips for sale! Great stocking-stuffers!" (I figure he was probably doing a brisk business with tourists who then took them home and said, "Hey, Marge, look what they're selling on the streets of New York!" Like Broadway shows, it's probably only the tourist trade that keeps him going.)

What's BIG in the Small Press

Sunday, 1 PM

Mark Olson (mod), Ken Gale, Carl Lundgren, Charles Ryan, Lawrence Schimel

First the panelists listed their small press "credentials." Olson works with NESFA Press, which started out doing books to honor the Guests of Honor at Boskones, but has branched out into doing other works, its latest being THE REDISCOVERY OF MAN, the collected short stories of Cordwainer Smith. Gale does Evolution Comics, Lundgren does his own art books, and Schimel

does poetry through Midsummer Night's Press, a letter press. Ryan does "First Books," which he said was an example of how small presses take the risk when large companies will not. Olson agreed with that, saying that when NESFA Press had gone back to Smith's estate to try to purchase the rights for NORSTRILIA, they were told that these rights were more valuable and would cost more than NESFA had offered to pay. NESFA pointed out that they were more valuable precisely because NESFA had published the collection and generated new interest, but also said that if the estate could sell the rights to a major publisher for the higher price, that was fine with them: NESFA's goal is to get the works they like back in print.

Among the problems faced by small press publishers seems to be the necessity to pay "placement fees" to get distributors to carry them. (So far as I could tell, these were more like bribes than legitimate fees.) Ryan said that the inability to pay these fees was one reason why ABORIGINAL had problems getting into the market. Also, bookstores want a lot of extra copies. For example, Waldenbooks wants no more than 50% sell-through, meaning that if the publisher sends them 1000 copies, at least 500 will not be sold and will be destroyed. So if the publisher is working on a small margin, meeting these requirements is impossible.

NESFA also has problems because of the marketing. Dealers get a 40% discount, so the list price for the book must actually reflect a profit at their wholesale rate, e.g., if the book costs \$12 to produce, then it must be priced at a minimum of \$20 just to break even. And bigger distributors want bigger discounts (50%-55%), so if you plan on using those, the list price goes even higher (in the previous example, it would have to be \$25). Of course, this means when you buy direct from NESFA (at a convention, for example), they get a lot more of the profit.

Good reviews help a little--NESFA estimates that they add about 6% to the retail sales of the book. (THE REDISCOVERY OF MAN was reviewed favorably in PUBLISHERS WEEKLY, for example.) Harlan Ellison's rantings about the same book at ConFrancisco, colorful as they were, seem to have added only about thirty more retail sales than NESFA was expecting there.

There was some discussion of hardback versus paperback books and their marketing. Someone gave the example that Tor does a hundred hardback books a year and a thousand paperbacks, yet makes more on their hardbacks. This undoubtedly has to do with the returns system--unsold hardbacks are returned to Tor for resale, while unsold paperbacks are stripped and destroyed. Also, some magazines and newspapers will not review paperbacks, which means less exposure.

Authors and artists who are currently being published almost entirely by small presses include Carol Emshwiller, David Bunch, and R. A. Lafferty. Someone mentioned Edward R. Tufte's VISUAL DISPLAY OF QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH from Graphics Press, and Tom Clancy got his start having THE HUNT FOR RED OCTOBER published by the Naval Institute Press.

Small presses used to do more with "collector's limited editions" (or maybe one should say that there used to be more small presses who specialized in them), but the market crashed a few years ago. Some, like Mark Zeising and Donald Grant, are still around, but others, such as Pulphouse and Phantasia, are gone.

**The Transcendent Man--A Theme in SF and Fantasy
Sunday, 2 PM**

Evelyn C. Leeper (mod), Jeffrey A. Carver, Geary Gravel, Nancy C. Hanger, James D. MacDonald

(Thanks to Mark Leeper for taking copious notes at this panel.)

There were the usual introductions. Carver writes about transcendence in books such as NEPTUNE CROSSING. Gravel said something about "transcending the limits on animation," whatever that

meant. Hanger said she was in editorial production and a priest (she did not say of what church). MacDonald said his books could be found under Doyle (Debra Doyle, his co-author).

We all agreed we were talking about the transcendent person rather than just the transcendent man. Of course, that still left us with the question of what exactly was meant by transcendence. My reading beforehand led me to believe that this meant the transformation of the physical into the spiritual, and while there were some stories that used this as a theme, there were not many. However, by extending the definition of transcendence to include any transformation of humans into something substantively greater (or at least different), we could find far more to talk about, and indeed that is the definition we used.

At the beginning some examples were given, just so the audience could get a handle on what we meant. Carver mentioned Greg Bear's *BLOOD MUSIC* as an example of a physical transformation. (A spiritual transformation, on the other hand, might involve no physical transformation.) Gravel said that things that affect one person affect all of humanity and gave Alfred Bester's *DEMOLISHED MAN* and *STARS MY DESTINATION* as examples. When someone is transformed, they ask, "What do I do now?" and the answer seems to be, "Go cosmic. Push the race someplace new." Carver felt that at its core science fiction was about the transformation of man, and that in a real sense what people were saying was true, but not in a science fiction sense. Someone noted that science fiction novels deal with how we get from here to there, while in fantasy the transcendence is often assumed and is the basis of the story.

Hanger saw transcendence as "man plus" building a "newer, better man," but always making sure that the result still had a soul. MacDonald asked if there was any way to prove that transcendence had happened, and if we were not really talking about a type of elitism. Carver responded that we were not--that we were not talking about some people being above others, but about everyone changing into something different. He gave the example of Vernor Vinge's *FIRE UPON THE DEEP* and its part of the galaxy known as the Transcend. I suggested that this idea was very similar to Poul Anderson's *BRAIN WAVE*, in which the Earth passes out of a cloud that has slowed down our mental functions, and as a result we become much smarter. Hanger said that she would not call that transcendence, but did not know what she would call it.

Carver said that there have been examples of transcendence in science fiction, and cited Arthur C. Clarke's *CHILDHOOD'S END*. Hanger added Spider and Jeanne Robinson's *STARDANCE*. I said that a lot of Olaf Stapledon dealt with transcendence, often physical (as in *LAST AND FIRST MEN*), but often spiritual. Indeed, many of his beings are not physical entities in the usual sense in the first place.

Gravel said that transcendence was a very attractive idea--the science fiction fan wants something that will transform us. I said this made it sound as though transcendence came from an outside influence or force rather than from within. Gravel said that in fiction, of course, this outside force was the author, and added, "I like the author as God." He again gave as a good example of transcendence in science fiction *THE STARS MY DESTINATION*, in which the result of the transcendence is that "man will spill out into the stars."

As an example of non-human transcendence, I talked about Arthur C. Clarke's "Dial 'F' for Frankenstein," in which the telephone switching system gets enough computers added to it that the complexity reaches a certain level and it becomes sentient. MacDonald said that might be connected to the fact that lawyers communicate over the telephone; I asked him if he also wrote for the *WEEKLY WORLD NEWS*. (By the way, did you know that according to the *WEEKLY WORLD NEWS*, during the recent Los Angeles earthquake the freeways cracked open and demons from Hell came through the cracks?)

Even what is often called the first science fiction novel, Mary Shelley's *FRANKENSTEIN*, deals

with a form of transcendence. And the early science fiction film METROPOLIS does as well, giving the theme a long history in that medium too. Carver said that in these and other works, the old issue of transcendence centers around who we are and why we are here, and that when hard science fiction examines these questions, you have the point where hard science fiction merges with fantasy and religion.

Hanger asked if someone can be transcendent without God's interference; can an author write a novel convincingly in which this happens? This, of course, is one of the underlying themes of FRANKENSTEIN. Gravel pointed out that since MacDonald had asked earlier if there was any way to prove that transcendence had happened, and said that he thought that the only way you could be sure was if God appeared and validated it. Audience members said that all of this got into the difference between the Western and Eastern ideas of godhead. The Western idea says that God is external to us; the Eastern idea is that God is internal (is within each of us). Therefore, if we transcend, then the seed of transcendence was in us all along, so it is not really transcending. Carver said that there are novels that assume no outside influence (i.e., God), and gave BLOOD MUSIC as one example.

MacDonald said that the problem was that often the transcendence or transformation can be interpreted as just in other people's perceptions. If we say it is the perception of others, then we cannot say it has happened at all, and if it's from inside, then we cannot tell whether it has "really" happened either, even if (as Hanger suggested) we assume a limit and say that anything beyond it is transcendence.

Of course, in many stories human beings reject transcendence, and Gravel pointed out that a lot of science fiction says that the best thing you can be is human. COCOON 2, for example, is about why the human beings who have been given eternal youth (certainly a form of transcendence) are not happy with it. Someone in the audience pointed out that frequently after transcending, going back means dying or getting killed. Hanger noted that coming back for the wrong reasons is not acceptable either (and cited "The Little Mermaid"). This reinforced Carver's question as to why anyone would *want* to come back from transcendence (other than to move the plot along). Then too, in some stories people do not give up transcendence, but rather refuse it in the first place: some of the characters in BRAIN WAVE and also in Robert Charles Wilson's HARVEST.

I said that a lot of mythologies have the story of the god who becomes human, although of course the question is whether he really *becomes* human or just seems human. If he knows that he cannot die (permanently), then he isn't fully human. Someone in the audience said that Roger Zelazny's LORD OF LIGHT and ISLE OF THE DEAD are stories about transcendence, in which characters take on the godhead but are still human, and that ISLE OF THE DEAD actually "plays both sides of the fence." (I have not read it, at least not recently, so I couldn't say.)

Gravel said that LORD OF LIGHT was definitely about transcendence, but that even as gods people were human. Similarly, in the film FORBIDDEN PLANET it was the human (or rather, non-transcendent) nature of the Krell (and of Moebius) which remained in force that made the transcendence such a danger. Gravel said that the latter is showing there are things you cannot do (shades of "there are some things Man was not meant to know/tamper with"). In H. G. Wells's "Man Who Could Work Miracles" the main character is given great powers, and then must be bailed out by the angels at the end. Hanger responded that this belief in human limitation was a function of two thousand years of Catholicism shaping our views. Mark Leeper added that the Kabbalah required that you have the right motives for using it. And of course they must be genuine right motives--you cannot will yourself to want something for the right reasons.

Someone in the audience asked how an author could depict super-intelligent creatures. Carver said that one way was from the "other's" (i.e., that being's) point of view. I noted that Daniel Keyes tried to do this in FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON, which of course is another transformation story, but

that of an individual rather than of humanity as a whole.

MacDonald asked if Superman was transcending in his phone booth. Carver responded that Superman was always Superman; he was merely changing his persona. On the other hand, I pointed out, a werewolf is genuinely undergoing a transformation. Someone in the audience added that Captain Marvel was another example of a genuine transformation, and MacDonald asked, "What about Batman?" I said that no, he didn't get any new powers when he put on the costume. On the other hand, is the growing up of a child into an adult transcendence?

Gravel concluded by saying, "Science fiction readers are transcendence people. Most of us look at the film *THE MAN WHO COULD WORK MIRACLES* and say, 'I'd know what to do.'" At the very end of the panel, Carver said that without the theme of transcendence we would not have science fiction today, to which I immediately responded, "How can you say that at the end when there's no time to discuss it?!" So we have a lead-in for a panel next year if anyone's interested.

Does It Have to Be a SpaceMAN?: Gender and Characterization

Sunday, 3 PM

Hal Clement, Peter Johnson, Evelyn C. Leeper

After the previous panel we went down to the Green Room so that Mark could get reimbursed for the origami paper he had bought. The phone rang, and someone called me to it. Who could be calling me in the Green Room? It was Laurie Mann, who said she was at the panel on gender and characterization and none of the scheduled women panelists had shown up. Since having a panel on gender that had only men on it was a little peculiar, she asked if I could fill in. So it was not really me that the call was for, but any woman who happened to be there.

At any rate, I agreed to do the best I could, given that I had no preparation and the panel apparently had no moderator. (By sitting down between the other two panelists when I arrived, I managed to inherit that task.) But I can't say that much of substance was discussed or concluded. After all the panelists agreed that, no, it doesn't have to be a space*man*, what else was left? Clement said that he usually avoided the issue entirely by using aliens instead of human beings, because the science and world-building was the part he liked, not the characterization. I said that it was more important to have realistic characters than some artificial mix, and that while Heinlein's women are often used as examples of strong women characters in science fiction, they are really fairly badly drawn--but then, so are Heinlein's men. The discussion filled the hour, but I can recall nothing else to include here. (I realize now how much I have come to depend on Mark's notes for panels I'm on!)

Deconstructing Tokyo: Godzilla as Metaphor, etc.

Sunday, 4 PM

Jim Mann (mod), Bob Eggleton

(Having stayed for the 3 PM panel, we figured we might as well stay for this one as well. After all, the drive home was not going to include a blizzard this year.)

There's not too much to say about this panel. There were only four or five attendees (all of whom got official Boskone "Godzilla Fan" ribbons). The panelists felt that because of the way Godzilla films are perceived in the United States, people do not notice some of their positive points. For example, according to the panelists, they are filmed beautifully. And although the effects are often done on a shoestring (or perhaps because of this), the effects are frequently ingenious.

Mann said that the Godzilla films have a certain charm. (Well, if that were not true, at least for some people, this panel probably would not have happened.) Eggleton said that the Japanese are really into the idea of the "inner child," so the best Godzilla films are made for the child in us.

The rest of the time was just general reminiscences and a mention of the KAIJU REVIEW fanzine.

(Shortly after Boskone, Mark and I saw the original GODZILLA--before they chopped out a bunch of stuff and added Raymond Burr. The original is very different from the American version.)

The Green Room

Unfortunately, there were no really interesting conversations in the Green Room this year. Last year, for example, I came in just in time to hear Esther Friesner say, "Do you have any idea how big a walrus's penis is?!" I guess the era of great Green Room conversations is passing along with other old Boskone traditions.

Leaving

Leaving was much easier this year--no dead battery. We skipped the Traveler Restaurant Book Cellar; the gimmick of "a free book with every meal" is cute, but the books are of the sort one would find at the end of the day in a rummage sale and the food is undistinguished. Instead we ate at a Chinese restaurant recommended by Jim Mann--okay, but nothing great.

Miscellaneous

(If I went to fewer panels this year, why is my report 15% *longer* than last year's? And, no, that is not counting the appendix!)

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

Next year for Boskone 32 (February 17-19, 1995) the Guest of Honor is Diana Wynne Jones.

Neglected Fantasy and Science Fiction Films

Film comment by Mark R. Leeper

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One of the things I like to do occasionally in my film reviews is to make reference to some very good film that I doubt most of my readers have heard of and that I would like to call some attention to. There are a lot of decent films, and a handful of very good ones, that at this point may exist only in the film libraries of obscure television stations, and when these few prints disappear the films will be gone. I would like to generate some interest in four of these films, if not to help save them, at least to alert people that if you do get a chance to see these films, it is a rare chance and you should give them a try.

Of course, there are a lot of obscure films that are showing up on videotape today, many of them very poorly-made films, and it is ironic that some terrific films are being over-looked, but in each case I think I can understand why some producer would think the film would not sell well on tape. There are three science fiction films and one horror film. However, none of the film has special effects. Particularly for science fiction, people have come to expect visual effects. I guess they feel that if they do not really enjoy the story then at least there will be something interesting to watch. These films are just actors in front of a camera, perhaps with a very rudimentary make-up effect thrown in (but very little). Three of the films are in black and white and unfortunately that is also considered to be a strike against a film. I still recommend these films highly to watch for.

THE MIND BENDERS (1962) (directed by Basil Dearden)

This film combines Cold War thriller elements with science fiction and a compelling human story. A

scientist working on sensory deprivation commits suicide and is discovered to have been passing secrets to the Soviets. Was he to blame or could his mind have been twisted while under the influence of the sensory deprivation tank? The government decides to experiment to find out. Another scientist working in the same field (played by Dirk Bogarde) is very devoted to his wife and family. Can they change that in his personality while he is in the tank? This film is well-acted, enthralling, and atmospheric.

UNEARTHLY STRANGER (1963) (directed by John Kirsh)

A secret project is working on space exploration right in the heart of London. The approach to exploration is a novel one. Rather than sending the whole human into space, they are working on a sort of technological out-of-body experience. Project your mind to another planet and there have it take on physical form ... invasion by mental projection. The rub is that scientists on the project are being killed in some mysterious way involving super-high energy. And the wives of some of the scientists seem to have no background that project security can trace. The script is tense and the acting is quite good, with a cast that includes John Neville (A STUDY IN TERROR, THE ADVENTURES OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN) and Jean Marsh (UPSTAIRS, DOWNSTAIRS). (This film is so obscure that Leonard Maltin's usually very complete MOVIE AND VIDEO GUIDE overlooks it.)

DARK INTRUDER (1965) (directed by Harvey Hart)

This film is only 59 minutes long and originally was intended as a television pilot, but was released to theaters to play with films such as William Castle's I SAW WHAT YOU DID--which it far out-classed. Leslie Nielsen plays a detective in late 19th Century San Francisco whose foppish appearance hides a man very knowledgeable and adept in matters of the occult and the supernatural. A series of unsolved murders and a friend's blackout spells may be connected and have some occult significance. Mark Richman and Werner Klemperer also star. The latter, best known as the gullible commandant from HOGAN'S HEROES, does a terrific job in a sinister role.

QUEST FOR LOVE (1971) (directed by Ralph Thomas)

This film is loosely adapted from the short story "Random Quest" by John Wyndham. Colin Trafford (played by Tom Bell) is a leading scientist at Britain Imperial Physical Institute when one of his experiments goes wrong. Suddenly he finds himself in a parallel London in a parallel Britain that has not been to war since the Great War in the early part of the century. Trafford here is not a physicist, but a popular playwright. He is also now married to a beautiful woman (played by Joan Collins) whose life he has made miserable with his selfish ways and his philandering. Can Colin convince the world he is the playwright while convincing his new wife that he is different? Then there are plot complications that lead to a fast-paced climax across parallel worlds. Denholm Elliot also stars in the story which is part science fiction adventure and part love story.

Of these four films only the last is in color. At present, the only one available on video, UNEARTHLY STRANGER, is offered only by a tiny specialty house, Sinister Cinema. Of the four, only QUEST FOR LOVE has played on New York area television in the last fifteen years. I would much like to get my hands on copies of THE MIND BENDERS or DARK INTRUDER.

**Addendum for BOSKONE 31: Additional Films to Look For
FAUST (1926)**

Director F. W. Murnau is better known for NOSFERATU, but there is a lot of good visual fantasy in this film version of the famous play by Goethe. There is a terrific image of the Devil spreading his cape over a village, and many other visual surprises throughout.

THE MAN WHO LAUGHS (1928)

The story could be better, but Conrad Veidt is terrific in the role of a man whose face is carved into a huge involuntary grin. Veidt conveys a full range of emotions through his eyes alone. The grinning Veidt was the visual inspiration for Batman's foe The Joker.

THE DYBBUK (1939)

At times this is very slow but also at times a very effective horror film. This was a low-budget film done in Yiddish. The "Dance of Death" scene had become an eerie classic. The story deals with a man's soul returning from the dead to possess the woman he loved.

THE SEVENTH VICTIM (1943)

Other Val Lewton films get more attention but this film is blacker and bleaker than anything every done in film noir. This is a solid mood piece that stands above Lewton's other films. A woman searching for her sister runs afoul of murder and Satanists.

NIGHT OF THE DEMON (a.k.a. CURSE OF THE DEMON) (1957)

This film has gotten some attention because of an allusion in a song in the ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW but it is rarely seen. That is a pity because it is quite a nice little supernatural thriller. It suffers a little from showing the audience too much too soon, but it still is suspenseful and well-written.

NIGHT OF THE EAGLE (a.k.a. BURN, WITCH, BURN) (1962)

When Richard Matheson and Charles Beaumont co-write a screenplay based on a novel by Fritz Lieber, you just naturally expect a good thriller. This story about an empirical college professor discovering that his wife and several other professors' wives around him are actually witches is very well-produced.

DEVIL DOLL (1963)

This is a wildly uneven film, but it has many very good moments. There have been several attempts to do the stories of ventriloquist dummies who have lives of their own. This is the most intriguing treatment of the theme. For once the secret of the dummy is not a let-down.

CRACK IN THE WORLD (1965)

The first and last ideas of this film are pretty silly, but in between this is a fairly exciting super-disaster film. Some of the visuals are spectacular. There is also some complexity to the characters.

QUATERMASS AND THE PIT (a.k.a. FIVE MILLION YEARS TO EARTH) (1968)

This film is finally getting a cult following and some recognition. It is much better known in Britain. The model of what a science thriller should be, it unfolds like a science fiction detective story uncovering a discovery that has greater and greater implications about the nature of mankind. This is one of the great idea films of science fiction cinema.

THE DEVIL RIDES OUT (a.k.a. THE DEVIL'S BRIDE) (1968)

Richard Matheson's adaptation of the black magic novel by Dennis Wheatley takes a science fiction-like approach to Satanism. It is fast-paced and at times fairly intelligent. Also worth seeing is Hammer Films' other adaptation of Wheatley black magic, TO THE DEVIL A DAUGHTER.

WITCHFINDER GENERAL (a.k.a. CONQUEROR WORM) (1968)

A vital and well-made historical fringe-horror film about one of the great villains of English history, Matthew Hopkins. Even Vincent Price does a reasonable acting job. The original musical score is actually quite beautiful, though there is a version with an entirely different and much less enjoyable score.

SATAN'S SKIN (a.k.a. BLOOD ON SATAN'S CLAW) (1970)

In some ways an imitation of the style of WITCHFINDER GENERAL. A 17th Century English ploughman turns up the remains of a demon and the artifact exerts satanic influence on the children of the region. This is a very atmospheric film with an authentic historical feel.

COUNT YORGA, VAMPIRE (1973)

This low-budget horror film redefined the concept of the vampire. As a reaction to the staid, hypnotic, and slow vampires of British horror films, this film makes most vampires fast moving predatory deadly animals who hunt in packs. At the time this was pretty scary stuff and the film still has a lot of its impact.

PHASE IV (1974)

Two mutually alien intelligences in the beginnings of a serious war. It is really more about how each side collects information about the other and uses its physical differences against the other. Ants somehow develop a gestalt mind and prepare to make themselves the masters of the world. Visually very impressive with direction by visual artist Saul Bass (best known for creating striking title sequences for other directors' films). There is also some terrific insect photography.

WHO? (1974)

This fairly accurate adaptation of Algis Budrys' novel had film stock problems (!) and could not be released to theaters. That is a genuine pity. Cold War story of its near future has a scientist important to military defense in a bad accident. The East Germans get hold of him and return him to the West more prosthetic than living matter. Now the problem is, how do you prove that he is who he says he is?

THE LAST WAVE (1977)

Australian Peter Weir build his reputation on this strange, mystical film about a lawyer who finds he might be the fulfillment of an Aboriginal prophecy. Images of nature out of balance and an intriguing story make this story a real spellbinder. This is a hard film to pigeon-hole and the intelligence of the writing never flags.

DRAGONSLAYER (1981)

Lots of films try to do Medieval high fantasy, but this is probably the best. With the death of a great magician, his young apprentice must see if he has mastered enough of his master's art to destroy a terrific dragon who is ravaging the countryside. There are lots of nice touches in the script and the dragon is the best ever created on film.

KNIGHTRIDERS (1981)

George Romero says he got this out of his system and never has to make another film like KNIGHTRIDERS. What a pity! This was one of the best films of its year. Superficially this is the story of a traveling Renaissance Fair that features jousts on motorcycles. But it has some terrific characters and a theme of the struggle between integrity and commercialism and between idealism and practicality. And late in the film the viewer realizes that the film has also been doing something else all along.

LIFEFORCE (1981)

Very few fans are willing to look beyond the naked woman and the zombies to see what is one of the most bizarre and audacious concepts for any science fiction film. Vampires, we learn, are really beings that leak "lifeforce" into the atmosphere like a tire with a slow leak leaks air. They must replenish the force regularly or they die. Much as we put bacteria into milk to multiply and make yogurt or cheese, some huge, incomprehensible, amoral, alien race seeds earth with vampires. The numbers of these numbers will increase exponentially, leaking more and more lifeforce into the environment so the aliens can vacuum it up.

A CHINESE GHOST STORY (1987)

Hong Kong is making their own horror film movement for their own audience. Their films are fast-paced, usually liberally laced with comedy and martial arts, but also having some interesting horror concepts. No one such film is all that terrific (at least among the films I have seen so far) but some are astonishing and full of unexpected touches. Look for the CHINESE GHOST STORY films, WICKED CITY, and MR. VAMPIRE (which must have a different name in China since it is really

about Chinese "Hopping Ghosts").

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