

Boskone 36 Convention Report
A convention report by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Boskone 36 was held February 12-14, 1999, in Framingham, Massachusetts. There were approximately 800 attendees.

While a lot was the same this year as previous years, there were some differences, not all good. Boskone switched to a newspaper-style program book (apparently trying for a more timely volume as well as lower costs), but it was hard to use—it is difficult to "leaf through" a ragged-cut newspaper, and the arrangement was a bit different from what I was used to.

Another glitch was the out-of-date nature of the restaurant guide in it (ironic, given the changes were supposed to make it more timely). In particular, the Bangkok Oriental had gone out of business, as we discovered when we went there Saturday night.

The hotel had major problems with temperature control due to the untimely heat wave (it was 72 degrees Fahrenheit outside when we left work Friday) which caused problems with the air conditioning system and the water used caused a ceiling collapse in the dealers room (no damage to dealers' stock reported).

As usual, we arrived too late for any Friday panels. Kate also arrived late: the express bus driver was new and did not realize he was supposed to stop *in* Amherst as well as at UMass, so she had to wait two hours for the next bus. (Luckily she lives a block from the bus stop and could go home, have a cup of tea, watch a movie, and go back two hours later.) This meant she had only twenty-one minutes in the dealers room Friday, but still managed to spend \$107. She thinks this is a record; are there any other contenders?

We, on the other hand, bought nothing in the dealers room. There were a couple of Tor Doubles I had some interest in, but \$5 each was more than I wanted to spend for books whose contents I already had elsewhere. Given my overloaded reading stack (about two hundred books), I'm really looking for only a half-dozen books or so, and they just were not there. This should not be taken as a negative rating of the dealers room; other people were quite happy about all they found there.

Panel: SF Blockbusters: Are Big Budgets and Special Effects Hurting SF Moviemaking?

Saturday, 10 AM

Daniel Kimmel (M), Mark R. Leeper, Jim Mann

"Are special effects and big budgets causing ruining movies? Are they pushing producers to spend more and more time on spectacle and less time on plot and characterization? Is there an upside to the push for big budgets?"

After introductions, Kimmel claimed that special effects cause big budgets, but not vice versa. (This is not a hard-and-fast rule, especially now with CGI.) Mann pointed out that effects are often now the whole purpose of movie, "with no thought giving to plot or acting or anything else."

Leeper said that spectacle has been with us from the very beginning, but it was in historical or action films. As he noted,

there were several spectacle movies that had the same plot: "Two people who were old friends fighting each other in the last reel"—*Ben Hur*, *The Vikings*, and so on. But then spectacle films turned to science fiction. After all, he said, producers figure that Vikings are just old-time Klingons. But we still have the thoughtful science fiction.

Kimmel agreed with the historical perspective. He further noted that budget has little correlation to success (but later noted that science fiction films seem to be expensive). "Money [in the form of budget] is not the root of all evil." He further asked, "What is spectacle?" He claimed that *The Wizard of Oz* is spectacle, but is *Gattaca*? His definition of a spectacle film was one in which "you don't even care about the story or the characters because you're so caught up in the visuals." His reaction on seeing *Gattaca* was, "This is very intelligent so it's not going to go anywhere."

Leeper said that science fiction needs spectacle in addition to ideas. Kimmel seemed to agree, at least commercially, because he said he was concerned when he first saw *The Truman Show*, thinking it might have problems because of its lack of special effects. A film like *Pi*, he said, could be low-budget and lacking in special effects because it played in the art houses. (Kimmel also recommended *The Sticky Fingers of Time*, another science fiction film with no special effects).

But Kimmel said that major studios want big-budget films with big successes, not small films even if they produce proportional returns. And schlock goes to cable or home video. Mann quoted Tony Randall in an interview from the 1980s in which Randall said that studios did not want a \$3 million return on a \$1 million investment, they want \$70 million on \$15 million.

Mann raised the question of whether the audience is demanding this amount of expense. Kimmel compared it to an arms race. Mann said the 90/10 rule seemed to be in effect: 90% of the expense is used to get the last 10% of effect. Leeper pointed out that special effects used to help carry the story along without being convincing. For example, he said, when he was young he attended an opera performed with marionettes. It was not realistic, but no one objected. (Indeed, even today stagecraft can be far more symbolic than movies, though Broadway has also moved to the realistic spectacle.) But, Leeper continued, we've raised a generation that expects realism. Kimmel claimed that special effects are what makes it real to us even if it is unrealistic (e.g., sound in space).

Mann insisted that we can do both—some special effects movies have more than just special effects. Kimmel noted that one factor is the tension between movies and television, which has brought about wide-screen, color (or rather the decline of black-and-white), Dolby, etc. And you need lots of special effects for the trailer.

Leeper said that although it was a bit of a cliché, the film industry *is* an industry, and has to have a dependable product. You can order dependable special effects, but you can't order a dependable idea. And Kimmel quoted another truism: "That's why it's called show business, not show art."

Kimmel said that while one could order special effects, there was a life cycle for them. For example, he mentioned that *Altered States* had the rippling skin effect that made everyone "ooh" and "ah," but now that's old hat. Similarly, *Terminator 2* had the morphing, and now *that's* old hat.

Mann said that the effects techniques were accelerating, but missed the time when he used to look forward to the next Ray Harryhausen film. Kimmel said that when Harryhausen was asked what he thought of today's special effects, Harryhausen said that when he did it the screen would say, "Special Effects—Ray Harryhausen, period." Now, he said, there's five minutes of special effects credits.

Someone said, "*Star Wars* is slow by modern standards," generating the response from one panelist: "That's scary."

Kimmel noted that *Pleasantville* ostensibly does not look like a big-budget special effects film, but was actually very involved to do.

From the audience, Nomi Burstein said that the special effects in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* were also something that everyone ended up doing. Burstein said that Gary Wolfe is scheduled to do a prequel with Steven Spielberg using 3-dimensional-looking toons, and they needed a new level of special effects to do this. Mann says that what we are seeing are "attempts to perfect special effects to the Nth degree," and cited the re-issue of *Star Wars*, with its "beefing up" of the older effects. Kimmel pointed out that the new scenes do not add information to the movie, and Mann not only agreed, but thought that the new scenes in first film were "glitzy, a waste, and distracting." Kimmel said that the purpose was really that Lucas wanted to test the new special effects for the new "Star Wars" movies to see if audiences would accept them.

Looking for a combination of special effects with literate film-making, Kimmel said he would like to see Kenneth Branagh do a science fiction film. (He said *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* does not count.) He also mentioned Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula*. *Twister* et al are not science fiction movies, he said—they're amusement park rides. You need a powerful director who says, "I have a vision, I have a story I want to tell." Producer-driven work gives you *Deep Impact*, *Armageddon*, and *Godzilla*.

Mann disagreed a bit, saying that *Deep Impact* tried to be something else other than an amusement park ride; it has a real cast and its mistake was concentrating on a lesser character. Kimmel conceded that, but said that *Armageddon* was "boom boom joke" except when it was "joke joke boom." On the other hand, he said, *The Peacemaker* was "boom boom snore."

Kimmel gave *The Fifth Element* as an example of how "sometimes the story isn't worth telling." And *What Dreams May Come* was overproduced. (I described it as "a triumph of art direction over everything else.") He also cited *Toys* as another overproduced film. These are the sorts of things that Ken Russell can do this with a script and a tight budget, he said. Other films mentioned were *Dark City* and *City of Lost Children*. Kimmel said in these, the art direction is incredibly vivid, but these movies are about scripts and stories and the art direction serves the story. "And the mood," added Mann. And Kimmel added, "And *Gattaca*," as another film served by its visuals, not driven by them.

Kimmel said, "If I want to see just the visuals, I go to a museum." He said he was not saying that *City of Lost Children* was a *serious* story, but there *was* a story there.

Kimmel also mentioned that for those in the audience who do not track the industry, it is helpful to know there are seasons for films. The summer is amusement park films, while December is serious films, October is mostly mediocre horror films, etc. Another clue is that if the executive producer is the major creative force, it is probably a good sign.

I observe that I thought Jackie Chan provided more bang for the production buck than James Bond. The panelists said that foreign films in general provide more bang for the buck.

Kimmel said, "I keep saying story, story, story, but this is not a universal attitude," and cited Japanese anime as a counter-example. Mann quoted C. S. Lewis regarding reading "trash adventure versus "good" adventure; Lewis observed that "people who read trash don't want stuff like characterization bogging them down" (Mann's words, not Lewis's). Similarly, people who want action/special effects films may very well not want story bogging them down. And someone in the audience said that *Gattaca* would be a terrible date movie, because you could not concentrate on it.

Panel: The Regency and the Emperor: Popularity of the Late 18th/Early 19th Centuries
Saturday, 11 AM
Leigh Grossman, Sharon Lee, Madeleine E. Robins, Susan Schwartz

"The late 18th and early 19th centuries are popular both with readers in general and with science fiction readers in particular. On one side you have the popularity of books set in the Napoleonic Wars, such the Hornblower novels and the Sharpe novels. You also have many fans of Jane Austen and Georgette Heyer. And of course you have many fans of Patrick O'Brian, whose works reflect both of these sides of the time period. Why is this period and these works so popular with SF fans?"

Shwartz began by saying that based on her background, she could talk about Patrick O'Brian and insider trading. I'm not familiar with the O'Brian's books, so I do not know if this is useful.

Grossman suggested that people like to read books set in the time of the Regency because they are about people leading lives as complex as ours, but in which everybody knows the rules. Robins said that in addition, everybody wants to imagine herself either the Duke's daughter, or the goosegirl (because even if you were at the bottom, you had no way to go but up). But if you were in the middle, you were stuck with following the rules.

Shwartz said that in the film *Persuasion*, Anne Eliot is "right at the edge of what she can get away with," and to survive and act as she did required a lot of courage. Grossman described Austen's characters as being at best the bottom of the upper crust—they are wealthy but untitled. And Shwartz noted that another popular character, Horatio Hornblower, is the son of a doctor (and not of a Harley Street physician). He is a self-made man, an officer and a gentleman. Jack (O'Brian's character?), however, is not a gentleman. And someone noted that all O'Brian's officers are titled, but their wives come from all levels.

Grossman said, "With Hornblower, there's all the suffering," and Shwartz responded, "He needs Prozac."

From the audience, Mark Keller mentioned Richard Sharpe, who starts as a private soldier and rises. He marries into the upper class but it fails. Grossman pointed out that for at the time, when you enlisted in the British army, it was for life, not just a few years, so it was for people with no other options. Robins said that while this was true, Austen's and Heyer's

characters still look down more on someone in trade rather than a soldier or sailor with prize money. Grossman said that in spite of this, the army was not a mode of upward mobility.

It all hinges on economics, Robins said. All a woman could offer other than money was her virginity so this was considered very important. (Shwartz pointed out that Princess Diana was "examined" for this before her marriage.)

Regarding the comment earlier about rules, an audience member said that the grimmest book she had read was *A Civil Contract* by Georgette Heyer, in which they follow rules but it does not end happily. Robins said that Heyer did this on purpose to do something different with the reader; she wanted to throw out the rules.

Grossman said that she had studied the books that were the best-sellers then. There were books about all the rules, manners, and so on of the upper class. Some readers looked down on them, and some used them as guidebooks.

An audience member suggested Palliser's *Quincunx* as a book that shows what happens when women fall from the upper crust. Grossman added George Eliot's *Mill on the Floss*.

This was an era when the Napoleonic Wars, Industrial Revolution, etc., were changing all the rules. And Robins said that everything else was changing as well: music, art, etc. But though they set their novels in this period, Heyer never mentions corn riots, and Austen barely mentions Chartism or anything else. Robins thought that part of what appeals to the modern reader is that the nobility in these novels do not realize they're "dancing on the edge of a precipice." This is related to science fiction, she continued, in that what we see is a society not used to technological change getting hit with it.

Shwartz said that there was also a preoccupation with land, and Grossman said that another omission was that though all this takes place in the middle of the Enclosure Movement when commons are about to go away, there was nothing explicit about that either.

Grossman said that to understand the books, one must have some knowledge of the era. For example, a pound had the buying power of about \$500 of today's money, meaning that an annual income of a hundred pounds was a substantial amount. We also need to know about the food, drink ("gin was mother's milk to her"), pharmacology (opium was the wonder drug of the era, and laudanum was widely used). Grossman also said that we can't talk about Regency with mentioning costumes. An audience member said that the Regency reminded us that "there were other generations who did just as stupid things as high heels and bras." Robins added, "God bless Beau Brummel, who actually made it fashionable to wash."

Though earlier, the story of the goose girl who rises to a higher position was mentioned as having some interest, Robins said that "no one wants to read the story of the goose girl [who remains a goose girl]", they want to read about the upper class.

Until Dickens's time, Grossman claimed, it was not acceptable for men to read novels (or write them). She said that the first novels for men were disguised as travel stories. Robins disputed this, saying that the Prince of Wales asked Austen to dedicate *Emma* to him, which would indicate that he read at least some novels. Shwartz thought that the lowly status of novels then was similar to the way science fiction is looked at now.

Grossman said that this was also the period that saw the start of the separation between work and home, and the work at home, not being paid, gets devalued. Someone said that in the Regency women still had some hope of doing useful work (consulting with husbands on land, etc), but by Victorian times the only work allowed was ostentatiously useless (e.g., fancy needlework).

Robins said this was also a period of religious revival. This was Samuel Smiles promoted his self-improvement mantra of "Every day in every way we're getting better and better." Shwartz pointed out that we do see the religious aspect in novels such as Eliot's *Middlemarch* and *Adam Bede*. Grossman described it as the period of the "British millennial movements." (In this case, "millennial" means more like "the-end-of-the-world" than it refers to an y thousand-year period.)

Panel: From Wells to Willis -- Variations on Time Travel in Science Fiction
Saturday, 1 PM
Michael Burstein, Paul Levinson, Connie Willis

Levinson began by saying he found time travel "fascinating and unique because it is utterly impossible" in a way that faster-than-light travel is not. Faster-than-light travel, he explained is impossible "only" due to current theory, while time travel violates certain fundamental logical aspects of our lives. For example, "travel to future violates our sense of free will." And "because of those possibilities, that's why we find time travel so tantalizing and enjoyable."

Willis felt that the "past is the ultimate forbidden country." And she said that when she was reading science fiction when she was growing up, space travel felt possible, but time travel did not. "It's the sense that the past is so truly irrevocable that makes us long for it." She described the scene in *Peggy Sue Got Married* where the time-traveling Peggy Sue (Kathleen Turner) answers the telephone and realizes it is her grandmother, whom she remembers as being dead for years. "Memory," Willis said, "is such a strong and powerful time machine." And we like time travel stories because of the "ideas of loss and regret and a more innocent time." "Time travel is the most powerful raw material or symbol or trope we have in science fiction," she concluded.

Burstein said he was the only physicist on panel, so felt obliged to point out that he believed that we will not be able to accelerate through the speed of light no matter what, though faster-than-light travel is possible if it does not involve that sort of acceleration. And faster-than-light travel is time travel according to physicists, so it is not meaningful to say one is possible and the other not.

But Burstein thought the real appeal of time travel stories was that they are nostalgic. There are, he claimed, three elements that time travel stories could have. The first is nostalgia (this would be stories like Jack Finney's *Time and Again* or Richard Matheson's *Bid Time Return*). The second is paradoxes, of which the ultimate is "Niven's Paradox," which states that a universe in which a time machine is invented is inherently unstable, and time travelers will keep changing it until they create a universe in which no time machine is invented. The third element is to see the future, and relativity will get you this.

Burstein did say that physicists theorize that if two cosmic strings are passing each other at high speed and you go around them, you could go back in time. However, he claimed cosmic strings do not exist, so he said this amounted to saying, "If you did something impossible with two non-existent things you could go back in time."

Levinson said he did not agree that faster-than-light travel is intrinsically time travel, but thinks it is just part of Einstein's theory, which could be wrong.

Willis said that using time travel allows you to examine the physics or philosophy, to write historical novels, or to do game-playing with paradoxes—or all three. She recommended a few classic time-travel stories: "Child by Chronos" (by Charles Harness), "The Yehudi Principle" (by Frederic Brown), "By His Bootstraps" and "All You Zombies" by Robert A. Heinlein, and "The Men Who Murdered Mohammed" by Alfred Bester. The other panelists mentioned "Great Escape Tours, Inc." (by Kit Reed) and "A Little Something for Us Tempnauts" (by Philip K. Dick), both in the anthology *Final Stage* edited by Edward L. Ferman and Barry N. Malzberg.

Levinson said that a lot of this was what he thought of as "the metaphysics of time travel," and that H. G. Wells tied all the elements together: the machine, a travelogue, and the metaphysics. He also thought that the time travel story was an example that artistic mode may seem exhausted but then get revitalized. He personally likes stories in which people are changing things and turn out bringing our universe into being (e. g., Isaac Asimov's "Red Queen's Race")

Willis said that this was drifting into a closely related genre, the alternate history story. She claimed Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee* was the first (which is not true even if you don't count Livy), and said that both it and Robert A. Heinlein's *Job* start in alternate worlds from our own. She talked about the pitfalls of alternate history: the divergence point is easy to do, but if you change everything as it would be changed, the world rapidly becomes very unfamiliar (Robert Silverberg's "Via Roma" is my classic example of this, though if you read all the stories in that series in internal chronological order, it is not quite so jarring), and if you do not, it is not realistic (any story with an alternate World War II and President Kennedy still elected in 1960).

Levinson said that he thought of alternate history stories as lazy time travel stories and that we are not given any explanation as to why the divergence should take place. (As an alternate history aficionado, I must protest that this is not always true. In fact, often these days the reverse is the case—the author spends a lot of time getting up to the divergence point and explaining it, then does not continue with what the effects would be, but just ends the story there.)

Saturday, 2 PM
James Patrick Kelly, Patrick (James) Nielsen Hayden

"One of SF's best short story writers and one of our best editors discuss the state of the SF short story."

Nielsen said that he edited the second half of Tor doubles, giving me the image of his editing the B side of all of them.

Kelly began by asking, "How has the mighty short story fallen?" He talked about the history of the short story, citing the classic *Famous Science Fiction Stories: Adventures in Time and Space* edited by Raymond J. Healy and J. Francis McComas as one of the peaks. It was difficult to get novels published in 1940s, so "the short story was king." Now, the short story's economic status if not its artistic status has eroded.

Nielsen Hayden hated to invoke the name, but said that before Roger Elwood anthologies were considered more reliable than novels. However, Elwood's flooding of the markets in the early 1970s with mediocre anthologies ended that. Now, single-author collections are published mostly as favors to authors (and often simultaneously with a novel so that the lower sales figures of the collection do not cause bookstores to drop the numbers they order). Anthologies are published for status or to make a philosophical statement (Hartwell's "year best" promises the "good old stuff" rather than the "literary stuff like in *Starlight*").

Nielsen Hayden echoed my sentiments when he said (in a statement whose spelling I cannot guarantee), "I tend to deplore the nichification of the field." He said that there are people who say, "I like only hard-boiled female military heroes" and that, fortunately or unfortunately, the field is large enough to cater to that.

When he started selling short fiction, Kelly said he had a choice between magazines and original anthologies (edited by such people as Robert Silverberg and Terry Carr). At that time, anthologies were more prestigious and lasting. What killed that? (My immediate thought here was the theme anthology.) Kelly asked, "Did we lose touch? Did we do too many literary experiments? "

Nielsen Hayden thought that it just became an over-exploited area of publishing. As he put it, "There were no real crap anthologies before 1973 or '74." Now it is actually easier for bad writers to get published if they can write to spec. Isaac Asimov and Martin H. Greenberg have a lot to answer for, he said. "[Mike] Resnick is proud that he never turned down a story that he commissioned, but my eyes go pinwheel over that."

Kelly said that there were fewer magazines now than in the 1950s. However, the 1970s had six major magazines, the same number as now. Of course, now the circulation is way down.

Kelly said that audiences change and the market changes, and asked if short stories no longer meet a need. Nielsen Hayden thought part of it was that the big names stopped writing short stories as novels got more remunerative. For example, he asked, "When was the last time Greg Bear wrote a short story?" Even Connie Willis's short story output, which is where her strength is, is way down.

Speaking about "hard science fiction" as seen in *Analog*, Nielsen Hayden quoted Teresa Nielsen Hayden as having said, "A lot of supposedly 'hard' SF is just SF that foregrounds the numbers and talks tough about engineering."

From the audience, Jane Yolen suggested that the marketing of short fiction is terrible: *Asimov's* is using tabloid-style headlines on its cover, but in general the packaging of magazines is not as jazzy as other media packaging that the audience is familiar with. Kelly said that the one magazine that is using more current packaging, *Science Fiction Age*, is surviving against all odds.

Drifting somewhat away from short stories, Nielsen Hayden said that mass-market science fiction never sold better than in the 1950s, leading Kelly to ask, "Did the rise of experimental writing pull good writers away from what readers wanted?" He thought that perhaps *Asimov's* reversed this by starting retro with Feghoots and space opera. Nielsen Hayden thought it was more that *Asimov's* "put out a signal that there was fun here." That was what he wanted to do as well, saying that *Starlight* was not a "literary" sort of anthology. "I don't want to publish *Quark* or *New Worlds*." Kelly thought that what Nielsen Hayden was saying was not how *Starlight* is perceived, and that the attitude seems to be, "If it's too weird for *Asimov's*, try it at *Starlight*." Of course, *Asimov's* is not as open to unusual stories as the older anthologies either, Kelly noted, adding "Gardner wouldn't buy some of the Gardner Dozois stories that Silverberg bought [for *Alpha* and *New Dimensions*]."

The question was raised whether editors ask for rewriting often enough? Do they bother? Often not, Kelly thought, saying that there were 300 people in SFWA when he started, now there are 1300. Nielsen Hayden agreed, saying all it takes to

join are & quot;three mediocre stories to three trumped-up anthologies." He described what he was seeing as the "growth of aspiring writer fandom." (I find it not unlike the current spate of actors becoming directors not because of their directorial talent, because they have the clout to do so.)

Someone mentioned that at least science fiction was not as inbred as poetry, where there are six hundred people writing works that sell six hundred copies. Kelly thought Clarion was turning out forty-five to fifty "okay" writers a year. Nielsen Hayden said that Clarion is related to the fact that "science fiction is a very friendly and social and sharing subculture." He said he did a workshop, but did not "commit Clarion." They agreed that Clarion is focused on the "commercially saleable" part of writing science fiction. It is very intense ("boot camp for writers"), and people there tend to bond—it almost becomes a cult. Kelly said, "It's a transformative experience but the unfortunate thing is that it doesn't always transform you into a writer."

Getting back to the numbers, Kelly asked, "Is there economic room in the market for five hundred writers?" And Nielsen Hayden replied simply, "No." He referred back to poetry, saying, "There have never been as many good poets writing in the United States as today, and nobody knows about any of them?"

Kelly thought writers needed some place to develop, saying, "No writer springs fully formed into print." Nielsen Hayden disagreed somewhat, telling Kelly, "Your early stuff is really ambitious garage rock, but a lot of the stuff I'm reading is somebody with a synthesizer doing lounge music."

Yolen felt that we have gotten rid of the "training wheels stories" and that we need more children's stories. Nielsen Hayden agreed, and said we should be starting children with fiction that has some of the current sensibility, not the older classics. Kelly agreed, saying that the older stories have no computers or video games, for example, and children do not identify with anyone in them. Nielsen Hayden said that on the plus side, popular culture is much better about science fiction than it used to be. The problem, he said, is that "no big authors want to write for kids. All the status is in writing science fiction for adults with adults' concerns and sensibilities." Kids care about power and all the other things that science fiction used to write about. "Take the science fiction field up to 1960—it's all YA." There are a lot of uses in publishing YA as YA, he said, but we should publish science fiction as science fiction that appeals to YA audience as well. Example of this that he gave include Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* and William Gibson's *Neuromancer*. (Kelly said when he speaks to schools, he always gets asked whether he knows Piers Anthony or Orson Scott Card.) Someone else mentioned that Steven Gould does this also.

Nielsen Hayden said that book-buying is up everywhere, but there are also a lot more cultural options these days. Someone thought that book prices cause shell shock, but many other felt that people were used to them, and that even children have the discretionary income to spend. Nielsen Hayden said his experience was that "when we talk about selling to young people, I think price is a big issue." Yolen noted that traditionally, short stories had not been popular with YA. Now they read media tie-ins, Michael Crichton, Stephen King, and Dean Koontz.

Someone asked, "What can be done for putting literary science fiction on the Sci-Fi Channel [where it would be seen by more people]?" Nielsen Hayden responded, "I think bagging the word 'literary' is a good start."

Kelly noted that even on a panel about short stories, "In the past fifteen minutes we have migrated to the novel." This is probably, he said, because novels have more literary impact. Nielsen Hayden pointed out that there are a lot of writers who are better at short stories than novels. Kelly thought that one problem might be that since people are not reading short stories, they do not understand the structure, etc., of the short story.

(Someone in the audience, referring back to the YA market, said that one reason short stories are not popular is that children have books available in school libraries, but not magazines. Children get their science fiction from school libraries these days? I am bogged.)

Panel: Masters of SF Satire: The Science Fiction of Tenn, Sheckley, and Pohl
Saturday, 3 PM
John R. Douglas, David G. Hartwell (M), Mark Keller, Daniel Kimmel

"SF has always been a great field for satire and the 1950s and 1960s produced some of the best. There were a number of SF satirists, but the leading figures were Robert Sheckley, William Tenn, and Fred Pohl. The panel discusses the works of these three as well as other SF satirists."

Hartwell began by asking, "Who were the others?" Kimmel named C. M. Kornbluth, and audience members suggested Philip K. Dick and Ray Bradbury.

Douglas thought that, commercially, none have lasted well, at least of the the major ones. He said that the 1950s was a very conformist culture, while science fiction looked at change and wanted to be something else. Keller thought that the button-down suburban culture was an easy target. "And a safe target," Douglas added. One reason that satire is a popular form of protest, he felt, is that if you were supposed to laugh, you could not get angry.

Hartwell said it was a great age of humor, including satire, mentioning Lenny Bruce, Mort Sahl, Pogo, television humor, etc. Keller felt that the 1950s was a time of release after being under great pressure, and that it was not all Eisenhower conformity. There was no Depression or war, and the Cold War had not started. (I would date the Cold War at least from the Berlin Airlift, 1948.) Kimmel pointed out it was *not* a fun time—for example, the Hollywood Blacklist was around. Douglas said that one factor allowing science fiction satirists free rein was that science fiction was not on the radar of the vast majority of the culture.

Hartwell said that the burgeoning of new magazines in 1949 and 1950 (in particular, *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* and *Galaxy*) allowed a place for satire. Keller noted that when these new markets opened up, older stories which had not had a market got sold to them, and a lot was science fiction. Hartwell mentioned that satirical novels, too, started to appear: Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth's *Space Merchants* has been in and out of print since then, and there were other novels, such as their *Gladiator-at-Law* and Edson McCann's *Preferred Risk*.

Kimmel said that while he is in awe of Pohl, Pohl's work is not screamingly funny. He thought Robert Sheckley was also satirical, and funny, but better in the short story form. Someone in the audience mentioned William Tenn, and Hartwell noted that Tenn had only short stories during this time. (Tenn refused to have a "Best of" anthology later because he refused to let Lester Del Rey edit his work.)

Other satirists named included Theodore Sturgeon, Frederic Brown, Stanislaw Lem (in the 1960s), and even Neal Stephenson (in the present, with *Snowcrash*).

Someone suggested that satire went mainstream, but Hartwell said, "Satire is, just bluntly, not the mainstream of our culture right now." Terry Pratchett, he felt, is too obvious about it, so is not popular in the United States (though hugely popular everywhere else). There are also Douglas Adams, Rudy Rucker, John Sladek (1960s through 1980s), the early Tom Disch, and even Daniel Pinkwater. (Hartwell said, "Satire is a constant part of Pinkwater's books.") Kimmel added the latest book by John Varley, *Golden Globe*, and someone mentioned Ishmael Reed.

Douglas said that satire can be done at any length, but it is easier at short lengths. (So the relative abundance of satire in the 1950s and its relative dearth now may be related to some of the factors discussed in the previous panel on short fiction.) Longer science fictional satirical works include John Barth's *Sotweed Factor*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, and Mark Twain's *Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. Hartwell said that one reason for 1950s science fiction satire being in short fiction was that the science fiction novel had not been invented yet as a form in the early 1950s. Kimmel repeated that Sheckley worked best at short stories, though Hartwell thought Sheckley finally got the novel right with *Mindswap*. As a satirist, Kurt Vonnegut provided a model for Sheckley and Dick.

Hartwell thought it interesting that at the time, Pohl was perceived as the junior partner in the Pohl/Kornbluth collaborations. This attitude persisted until the end of the 1960s, in spite of the fact that in 1958 Kingsley Amis said that the principal mode of science fiction was satire, and so Frederik Pohl was the greatest living science fiction writer.

Kimmel said that another pair writing satire were Henry Kuttner and C. L. Moore (who as Lewis Padgett wrote "The Twonky"). Keller said that the pairs played off each other, providing "collaborative feedback." Hartwell said, "One of Kornbluth's contributions to satire was a high moral tone," and that Pohl alone does not have that.

Kimmel thought the panelists should at least define satire. He said that satire does not have to make us laugh, but Douglas thought that "satire is about making us laugh and making someone else bleed." Hartwell said that "black humor" is often used as a term for dark satire, though not as much anymore. (He related that at a screening of *Mother Night*, someone said it was a bad movie because it made fun of the Holocaust. When the director said that it was black humor, a black woman got up and said that was a racist term. "This is why we don't have satire as a major mode of literature," Hartwell concluded.)

Douglas disagreed somewhat with that conclusion, citing Thomas Pynchon, to which Hartwell responded, "And he got it from reading science fiction."

Kimmel mentioned Eric Frank Russell as a satirist; audience members added Keith Laumer, Harry Harrison, James Morrow, Joanna Russ, and David Prill (who apparently wrote a story in which the national sport is embalming). Hartwell

said that "Doones bury" rather than "Dilbert" was satire.

Hartwell said that a characteristic of the 1990s is that we've all gotten interested in marketing. (Mark points out that a disproportionate number of characters in movies are advertising people.) Hartwell thought the beginning of the film *Wolf* is a fairly accurate representation of publishing.

Kimmel said that theater people say, "Satire is what closes on Saturday night." Someone asked, "Isn't litigation the death of satire?" There is some truth to this; one of the panelists mentioned that Tom Lehrer said that he quit singing because there was no place for satire in a world where Henry Kissinger could be given the Nobel Peace Prize, but he also lost a lawsuit brought by Werner Von Braun regarding Lehrer's song about Von Braun.

Someone mentioned the book *Publish and Perish*. (I have no idea if this is the collection by James Hynes subtitled "Three Tales of Tenure and Terror" or the Christian mystery by Sally S. Wright.) Keller said that it was "not a satire but an accurate simulation." Satire, he added, is hard to take because it is deadpan, not funny. Someone asked if satire can work if you don't know the subject being satirized. Hartwell thought so, saying "Satire requires an aesthetic distance on the part of the audience from the work" And someone pointed out that Gilbert and Sullivan addressed the same sort of bureaucracy as Dilbert, leading Sue Anderson to suggest "Dilbert and Sullivan."

Panel: You Probably Haven't Heard of ... But You Should Have and You Will
Saturday, 4 PM
Ginjer Buchanan, Laura Anne Gilman, Evelyn C. Leeper, Patrick Nielsen Hayden (M)

[Thanks to Mark, who in spite of a bad cold managed to take notes for me for this panel.]

This is one of those panels where I am not sure why I was put on it. Yes, I read a lot, and a lot of "non-mainstream" authors, but I am not really in touch with new authors.

I did suggest Jeremy Strahan's *Year's Best Australian SF & Fantasy 2*, and in general, I thought that any Australian author whose works made it to the United States was probably worth reading. I also recommended Herbert Rosendorfer's *Lett ers Back to Ancient China* and Ronald Wright's *Scientific Romance*, as well as works by Sean McMullen, and Bernard Werber's *Empire of the Ants*. I suggested that the more offbeat science fiction works could be found by reading such publications as *Publishers Weekly*.

The other panelists were more in touch with new authors: Gilman is at ROC, Buchanan is at Ace, and Nielsen Hayden is at Tor.

Gilman recommended Caitlan R. Kiernan (*Silk*), saying Kiernan had not received a third of the attention she deserved.

Many Australians and their works were recommended. Buchanan said that some of the best writing was coming out of Australia, but that one must read *Locus* assiduously to discover it. She said, "If you like Steve Baxter and Peter Hamilton, look in November" for Sean Williams and Shane Dix's *Divergence: The Prodigal Sun* (coming from Ace and previously published in Australia); she described it as "really good, old-fashioned in a certain sense but with a new sensibility." Williams and Dix also wrote *Universal Soldier*.

Many of these works did not or will not appear in hardcover, making them more affordable but less visible. Nielsen Hayden said that they try to do the good stuff first in hardcover. He said that Tor's contribution to bringing over Australian authors was Sean McMullen's *Souls in the Great Machine* duology. McMullen also wrote *The Centurions' Empire*. Tor also has the American rights to works by Isobelle Carmody, whom Nielsen Hayden said was as popular in Australia as Brooks and Pratchett are here.

Gilman liked Kate Forsyth's *Witches of Eileanan* and *The Pool of Two Moons*, which she described as fantasy with a Scottish twist. The first (I believe) is a retelling of James I, but you do not know this at the beginning. Gilman said her first rule is "no books in dialect," but Forsyth pulled her in and she read straight through lunch. The comment about dialect led me to mention that Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* is out in a new edition with notes. Buchanan asked, "Is he still with us?" I responded that yes, he was, but he does not appeal to millions and millions, (I also liked his latest science fiction, *Fremder*.)

Buchanan mentioned Jeffrey Barlough's *Dark Sleeper*, saying "If Charles Dickens wrote fantasy, it would be this book." Barlough is a veterinarian who self-published a hundred copies of this for friends, and then submitted it to Ace. It is the first of a projected seven-book series, and will be published in trade paperback.

The comments about dialect reminded Nielsen Hayden of Alasdair Gray, who wrote in dialect, and was not published by Tor. ("I am basically a genre guy," Nielsen Hayden said.) Gray illustrates his own stuff in quasi-woodcuts, and he is depressive. He wrote "The Great Bear Cult" about a quasi-fascist movement where everyone dressed up in bear costumes and chanted "bears are strong but bears are gentle." (It can be found in *Unlikely Stories, Mostly*.)

I mentioned Nisi Shawl and Nalo Hopkinson. Nielsen Hayden thought Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* was "sharp as several whips."

I asked what had happened to Ted Chiang. Buchanan said he never made it to a novel (which somehow implies that short fiction is not as important as novels—see previous panel). Nielsen Hayden said that Chiang's first story won a Nebula, which he found intimidating. (Actually, what Nielsen Hayden said was, "I met him and he looked terrified.") (It turns out that Chiang had a story in *Starlight 2*, which I didn't get around to reading until after Boskone.)

Buchanan said, "We will be publishing someone you have not heard of—Nina Kiriki Hoffman (whom Bob Devney described as like Zenna Henderson with sex). I had heard of Hoffman, who wrote *The Thread That Binds the Bones* and *The Silent Strength of Stones*, two unrelated books in spite of the rhyme. Hoffman's latest is *A Red Heart of Memories*."

Nielsen Hayden recommended Ken MacLeod's *Star Fraction*, *The Stone Canal*, and *The Cassini Division*. He noted that MacLeod was the only Trotskyist to win the Libertarian Prometheus Award—*twice*. Tor is publishing the last two, and Nielsen Hayden hopes to get the first. "I like his universe, The big ideas of science fiction have changed the world." Nielsen Hayden also referred to "the big concepts of the human future."

Gilman suggested Anne Bishop's *Daughter of the Blood* (which she described as "a malevolent fantasy about the redemptive powers of love), *Heir to the Shadows*, and *Queen of Darkness*. Other suggestions included Eric S. Nylund's *Signal to Noise*; Sharon Shinn's *Wrapt in Crystal* (a free-standing novel, not part of her series). Nielsen Hayden said in passing that he thought we needed a panel on writers you think you have pegged. For example, Bruce Sterling's latest novel, *Distraction*, is not at all what people might expect. (However, this indicates that we had certainly drifted far afield from writers "You Probably Haven't Heard of.")

Returning to new authors, Nielsen Hayden said there was Thomas Harlan's fantasy series, "Shadow of Ararat," set in a world in which Rome never ended and magic works. I asked how many books were in this series; Nielsen Hayden said that Tor brought four.

This led to mentions of other religious/historical books: Graham Joyce's *Requiem*, Gore Vidal's *Duluth*, and S. M. Stirling's *Island in the Sea of Time*. A more straight historical fantasy named was Christie Golden's *A.D. 99*.

**Panel: Rampaging Dinosaurs, Jet Propelled Turtles, & Giant Spiders: BIG Monster Movies
Saturday, 5 PM**

Julie E. Czerneda, Bob Eggleton, Daniel Kimmel (M), Mark R. Leeper, Jim Mann

"From King Kong to Godzilla, from Them to Gamera, giant monsters have attracted movie goers. The panel discusses the popularity of movies about big monsters—and why some work (despite plot absurdities) and others don't."

[Leeper provided a list of all giant monster films through 1990. Unfortunately, the disk file has gone missing.]

Kimmel noticed me taking notes in the front and began by saying that he was always nice to me and Bob Devney because "they have the power to quote me."

When Kimmel introduced Leeper, he said to Leeper, "You've been with Bell Labs when it was just two cans and a string," to which Leeper responded, "Longer than that. I was the one who suggested opening the cans."

Kimmel starting by saying, "Before this turns into a Godzilla/Gamera/King Kong love fest ..." to which I called out, "Which would be a hell of a movie also." But what he wanted was for the panelists to name their favorite giant monster

movies *not* including those three characters.

Eggleton said his favorite was *Them*. Czerneda liked 7th *Voyage of Sinbad*. Leeper chose categories instead: Harryhausen films and those directed by Eugène Lourié (*The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*, *The Giant Behemoth*, and *Gorgo*). Mann agreed with Eggleton and Leeper, naming *Them* and the Lourié films.

Kimmel points out that Leeper left out important films from his list, such as *Dragonslayer* and *The Blob*. While Leeper conceded the former, he explained he had set a twenty-foot minimum height. Discussion ensued as to whether the Blob met this height requirement. Similarly, *Food of the Gods* was not included, because the rats and chickens were under twenty feet tall. *Lair of the White Worm* was another missing film, though it would count only if the worm stood up. Kimmel later gave another one, *The 30-Foot Bride of Candy Rock*, Lou Costello's only solo film, which Kimmel said clearly met Mark's criterion. (I think that some of the old Hercules movies also had giant monsters.)

Returning to *Them*, Mann said it was good because it was well-written and well-paced. Leeper said it was basically a police procedural in which the clues get weirder and weirder. Eggleton said it also did not have cheap-looking effects, though Leeper pointed out that they got by with only one-and-a-half ants.

Leeper said that there are two philosophies of special effects: realistic effects, or effects that advance the plot. He described seeing an opera done with puppets—no one thought the puppets were realistic, but they served the purpose of conveying the story.

Returning to Godzilla (and bad special effects), Eggleton said that the series went "non-serious" in 1964 after *Godzilla versus the Thing*. Up to that point, they were about man messing around with something and not knowing what he was doing. Kimmel said that the only American film in this group he takes seriously ("not a popcorn movie") is *Them*, but in Japan the original *Gojira* was qualify. Eggleton pointed out that in Japan it atomic radiation was part of their history. But by 1964 he said that Godzilla had become a comment on commercialism and capitalism. (He felt that *The Incredible Shrinking Man* was another serious American film. Debate took place over whether this counted, with one issue being whether Scott Carey had a ruler shrunk with him.)

Mann felt one distinguishing characteristic was that serious films show the results of the monster attacks (bodies, crushed buildings, etc.), while others do not.

Someone in the audience thought that *Tarantula* tried to do what *Them* did. Someone else said that *The Deadly Mantis* is a serious film about the air defense system.

Someone asked why, if *The Mysterians* is on the list, where is *Kronos*?

Another question is why some of the absurd films work and some do not. Eggleton said it was a combination of charm and "kaiju-ega" (which he probably defined but I cannot remember). Czerneda said that monsters were so unreal that they were safe and would not scare you the way realistic films would. Kimmel pointed out that all caveman/dinosaur movies are unrealistic. He also cited the square/cube law as another problem with all these films.

Someone in the audience liked *Reptilicus* because it was written by Ib Melchior, a real writer. Burstein (and my notes fail to say whether it was Michael or Nomi) said that *Gojira* had the pacing of a Japanese film, not like an American film. Someone else said a film of this type, though without a giant monster, was *The Seven Faces of Dr. Lao*. Someone else said that *Gorath* had a giant walrus, but it was cut out of the American version.

There was a lot of talk about the latest Godzilla film, little of it positive. Eggleton said that in the 1950s, Irving Levine got the original Godzilla footage to add to the Hercules movies, but then decided it was its own movie.

Eggleton said that *Legend of the Dinosaurs* is the worst film he has ever seen. People did like *Tremors*, *Deep Rising*, and *Monolith Monsters*.

Eggleton thought all these films gave people a sense of control. Leeper saw it more as deconstructing the society in a more literal way than usual.

(Other films often overlooked that occurred to me later were *Chang*, *Moby Dick*, and *Jaws*.)

Saturday, 9 PM

Connie Willis was introduced as having "been writing since the late Cretaceous—she certainly invented the late Cretaceous." Unfortunately, no transcript or tape is available of her speech, so I'll include the few quotes I was able to jot down (a la Devney):

[The original letter asking her to be the Guest of Honor mistakenly said it was for the 1998 Boskone]: "I thought this was 1998."

"I have been up a really long time today, so if I nod off in the middle of speech ... [nodding off]."

She began with the news on everyone's mind, or least every television, newspaper, an jungle drum: Clinton's acquittal.

"My name is Connie Willis and I'm a CNN junkie."

Her award for "Crabbiest House Manager" was tie between Bob Barr and [someone] Sensenbrenner.

"The most used word was not "proportionality" or "rule-of-law" (which is one word), but "besmirched."

Willis reported that "Linda Tripp said that she hoped someone someday did to her daughter what she did to Monica Lewinsky." Laughter followed.

But Congress was back to its normal business of running the country, she said. Already, a bill had been introduced to add Ronald Reagan to Mount Rushmore, even though there was a good chance it would make Lincoln's nose fall off. In other news, Tinky -Winky was designated as the gay Teletubbie, and we also had the return of Dan Quayle. "So I have been on the phone to my representatives asking that they impeach someone again."

"What is Trent Lott's hair made of?"

She then talked about writing. There is a "great movie about writers: *Rich and Famous*. It is the most realistic depiction....except" She then listed a few inaccuracies, beginning with the fact that in the movie "no one ever picks up a pencil."

In real life, "there are no mink coats, no sex in airplane bathrooms, there is no time, the book is overdue, the computer ate chapter 19, you don't know what happens in chapter 20, you don't know what happened in chapter 18," (I need to learn shorthand if I'm going to try to transcribe Willis's long lists!)

Willis then gave good reasons to be a writer: "You get to make up stories and not be subpoenaed by Ken Starr. At least yet. You get to behave like a lunatic and no one locks you up. You ask people, 'Do you think apes have souls? Where do fads come from?'"

(She described going to her doctor about a cold and asking him about the symptoms of scrofula (for *Doomsday Book*, one presumes). "Why? Do you think you have it?"

"You get to be interested in macabre and disgusting things [and] perform bizarre rituals." (Hemingway sharpened 37 pencils every morning—and used a typewriter. Willis says her ritual is that she uses only Red Chief tablets.)

"You get rejection slips, writer's block, writer's cramp, and angry letters from readers. You get to read. You get to do research." Regarding the last, she said she discovered that in the 1600s there was this huge speculation fad about tulip bulbs—"does this remind you of the beanie baby fad?" She also learned about spiritualists, such as the Fox sisters, who made sounds by cracking their toe joints. Later, when they demonstrated this to debunk themselves, no one believed them. Madame Blavatsky at one point denied using trap doors, smacking the wall to emphasize her point—and the trap door flew up.

Someone once asked her, "You have opinions about everything, don't you?" To which she replied, "Well, yes, doesn't everyone? I thought that was the whole point."

"You get to contradict D. H. Lawrence and argue with Oscar Wilde."

"Writing conquers time, space, gender, race, the laws of physics, and death."

And she finished with "I think it is the best job in the world even if there isn't much sex in airplane bathrooms."

(Regarding research, Willis talked about how to research *To Say Nothing of the Dog*, she had to read A, which led her to B, which made her read C, and so on. I find the same problem even when I'm *not* doing research. I recently started reading Harold Bloom's *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. When I got to the chapter on *The Merchant of Venice* I had to go read that, and then John Gross's *Shylock*. That led me to William Hazlitt's *Characters in Shakespear's Plays* [sic] and would have led me to John Ruskin's *Munera Pulveris* if I could have found a copy. But there is still Faye Kellerman's *Quality of Mercy* and Christopher Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* and)

**The Best of the Art Show: A Guided Tour
Sunday, 10 AM
Stephen Youll**

This was the first time we had done this, and I would definitely recommend it to other people. We started off with just the three of us, but accreted people as we went. Having an artist talk about the various pieces—what he likes, what he does not like, how the artists achieves his effects, and so on—is very useful, particularly for people who are "art neos."

**Panel: This Book Sucks: How Not To Write Reviews
Sunday, 11 AM
Thomas A. Easton, Peter J. Heck, Evelyn C. Leeper, Steven Sawicki**

"What makes a bad book review? What sorts of things should book reviewers do? What kinds of behaviors should the avoid?"

I managed to wipe out my notes from this panel, so this is a summary (written a month later) from memory. However, there was not a lot of new information over previous such panels.

The general consensus was that people try to avoid writing negative reviews. This is partly because people try to avoid reading bad books. However, when a major author writes a bad book, reviewers feel obliged to warn people. And all the reviewers admitted to the fact that it was often more fun to review a bad book than a good book. Perhaps that why they agreed that they were more likely to review a bad book when they were starting out than now.

I said that in addition to avoiding bad books, I no longer review books in a series until the series is completed. I do not want to send someone to the first book in a series, only to have everything go downhill from there.

Sawicki said that he not only does he get complaints about negative reviews, but he has written positive reviews and gotten complaints from the authors, so there's no predicting what the response will be.

In response to a question about how readers can know how to interpret a review, I said that if I have any particular biases about the book, I say it up front—for example, that I really like alternate history, or that I'm not particularly interested in sports. Easton agreed, saying it was important to say where you are coming from, to let people know. And I observed that after you read the same reviewer for a while, you get to know if you can trust a review or not, or at least how to interpret it. This is why Usenet postings are often not very helpful—when someone you've never heard of posts "This book sucks!" with no other explanation, this tells you nothing. (Although in fairness, this happens more in the movie groups with "This movie sucks!" "This movie kicks ass!" is equally uninformative, and "This movie sucks ass!" positively incoherent.)

Panel: Why Is This Timeline Different from All Other Timelines? Jewish Alternate Histories
Sunday, 12 N
Esther Friesner, Mark Keller (M), Evelyn C. Leeper, Susan Shwartz

Shwartz began by mentioning a book she had written, *Grail of Hearts*, involving Richard Wagner, but it was not clear whether this was alternate history. I said I preferred Biblical (or otherwise ancient) change points, but I recognized that the problem with them is that if they are realistic, things change too much to be recognizable (as I noted, you might as well write about another planet), or if they are recognizable, they are not accurate. And of course another problem is the readers' general unfamiliarity with ancient history.

Friesner addressed the former issue, saying that one solution is, "Just don't bring it too far forward." She would like to see someone use a turning point not previously touched, when the Khazars considered converting en masse to Judaism. What would have happened if they had?

Shwartz says she likes to write about the Jews of Byzantium (e.g., *Shards of Empire*).

Friesner said she is going to be writing mainstream works about historical Jewish women. "One I want to do, she said, "is Esther Kira," who built an empire in Istanbul, selling to the harem. (My spelling of the name may be off.) There followed a bit of a digression about the Turkish rulers and the harem system, leading to someone's suggestion that *Dune* was really an alternate history.

Returning to the topic, Keller said that the first English-language alternate history story is Edward Everett Hale's "Hands Off": "What if Joseph had not been sold as a slave?" Hale's conclusion is that we would end up as cannibals killing each other.

I noted someone had suggested Disraeli's *Alroy* as an alternate history. This is about David Alroy, who set up a Jewish kingdom in Iraq in the twelfth century. While I suspect that the book attributes more success and power to Alroy than is accurate, I would not call it alternate history (secret history, maybe), but I thought the attendees might enjoy it.

We touched briefly on a Jewish Rome. Shwartz felt that Judaism would not have worked for Rome, but Keller thought a ferocious monotheism could take over a pantheism. I noted that the story "The Wandering Christian" by Kim Newman and Eugene Byrne used some of this idea. We did manage to avoid getting side-tracked into the "What If Jesus Had Never Been Born?" set of alternate histories.

I suggested as a point of divergence the Jews not being expelled from Spain. I also asked why we do not see more Jewish alternate histories. Friesner said that when she gets an idea she wants to hold it forever. Also, when you write you have to start with accessibility. However, she added, one of the duties of a writer is to build a bridge, because "the more understanding the less hitting."

Shwartz said that for her, writing about Judaism is personal. "*Grail of Hearts* was sheer anguish to write. I can write other things and sell a lot easier."

Nomi Burstein suggested that someone should write about the idea of Chaim Weitzmann as a scientist working on atomic bomb. She also mentioned something about an attempt to establish a Jewish colony in upstate New York (which reminded me and others of the "Jewish Chicken Farmers of New Jersey"), and the idea of Madagascar as a Jewish homeland. One of these (I forget which) caught Michael Burstein's fancy and he looked at her as if to say, "Why are you giving these great ideas away to other writers?"

As for accessibility, there is a lot of Jewish history that might provide some material, but people do not know it. For example, most people (including most Jews) do not know all that much about the various Jewish kingdoms. Jewish histories concentrate almost entirely on Ashkenazic history. And Jewish history also emphasizes powerlessness, according to Keller. So going counter to this can prove interesting. For example, what if the "hidden Jews" of New Mexico had reasserted themselves?

Of course, many people see some traditional Jewish writing as being alternate histories. Friesner thought that Esther was basically "what if Ishtar had been a nice Jewish girl?" Keller said that there was a Talmudic discussion of what might have happened if King Hezekiah (in 2 Kings 20) had died before fathering Manasseh. Someone asked if the two variations of creation story are alternate histories. And further variations are endless. What if Pharaoh's daughter had not found Moses? What if there were no kingdom under Saul and David?

I suggested that other points of divergence might be changes in the restrictive laws that forced Jews into certain professions. If Jews were allowed to own land, we might have had more Jewish farmers, and so on. Shwartz said that in Israel you have that—for example, Jewish fighter pilots. (Keller said that someone said if Israel ever got going its citizens would be lousy soldiers, but they would have a good university.)

I closed by saying that I like what Keller said about powerlessness, and how alternate histories can counteract that. Shwartz said that for all the appearance of powerlessness, "We have always had the power of the word."

The Origins of Consciousness: Julian Jaynes's Theories and Science Fiction
Sunday, 1 PM
Mark Keller, Evelyn C. Leeper (M), Paul Levinson

[This was my third panel in a row, and so my notes were going rapidly downhill.]

I suppose I should attempt to summarize Jaynes's theory as expressed in his book *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*. Briefly, Jaynes says that human consciousness came into being as recently as 3000 years ago, and that this can be used to explain why the ancients thought they heard the gods speaking to them. All this is connected somehow to the "left brain/right brain" theory. And if this is all you know about the theory, I suspect that the following will not be entirely coherent.

(When I first mentioned this panel to Mark, he said, "I'm of two minds about this.")

I started by noting that I am not a psychologist, nor do I have any background in psychology. I think Jaynes's idea is interesting and can be a good starting point for science fiction but, as with time travel and faster-than-light travel, I do not think it has any basis in fact. (In this respect, I would compare it to Aristotle's theories that inspired Richard Garfinkle's *Celestial Matters*.)

Jaynes begins with a comparison of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The former, he claims, is a description of life before consciousness, the latter after.

Levinson said that the *corpus coliseum* is the main brain connection, but our attitudes toward scientific research are not such that we can go around cutting this in healthy people to see what happens. (One rather science fictional possibility would be if we found viable ancient embryos—they might become bicameral, or they might not.)

Levinson said he had actually heard Jaynes speak, and had discussed all this with Marshall McLuhan. McLuhan thought that Jaynes had overlooked the importance of the alphabet, but Levinson said that this was not completely true.

Keller thought that the whole "right/left" brain dichotomy is overemphasized, but said that Jaynes's theory does emphasize the shift to a literate society. For further information on this, he recommended Leonard Shlain's recent book, *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess: The Conflict Between Word and Image*. However, he said, Jaynes *did* seem to overlook the differences between an alphabetic language and a pictographic one. For example, when you read Chinese, you do not hear the sounds as you do in alphabetic languages. And the disease "agnosia" causes you to lose the ability to read the latter, but not the former.

Levinson said that the alphabet versus pictograph issue had other implications. For example, it is difficult to describe an omnipresent, invisible, etc., being in a pictographic language, or at least in an ancient hieroglyphic language. The Hebrew prophets, he noted, existed after the alphabet, and had "a foot in each world." Keller later also said we should also distinguish between a phonetic and a phonemic language.

Jaynes seems to base his claims more on his desired results than on objective evidence. For example, he says that schizophrenia is dysfunctional because it's not common, and if it were common it would not be dysfunctional. Levinson said that (Karl?) Popper describes these types of claims as non-falsifiable. However, since schizophrenics in institutions do not form communities, this would seem to be some sort of contradicting evidence.

Keller said that another influence (or effect) of the voices was that for a long time reading was done out loud. In fact, St. Augustine noted when his teacher read silently because it was so unusual. Suford Lewis named Joan of Arc as a modern example of someone hearing voices. It was suggested that she may have been ill in a way that led her to hear voices. Bob

Ingria said that Socrates said he had a "daimon" that told him if he was doing or saying something wrong. Levinson added that Socrates did not like writing, which he felt would lead to memory loss, and would also lead to the idea of only one unchanging opinion. I had also heard that he felt that unless he was there to explain them, his words could be misinterpreted.

The two best known works based on Jaynes's work are Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* and Harry Turtledove's *Between Two Rivers*. There are also Levinson's "Consciousness Plague," Turtledove's "Bluff," and Margaret Wander Bonanno's *Preternatural*.

Bob Ingria said that William Burroughs thought that language was a plague from outer space. Keller said that Samuel Delany used language as agent of change in *Babel-17* and *Empire Star*. Someone else mentioned Jack Vance's *Languages of Pao*.

Someone asked if Jaynes thought that all people had the same two minds. Levinson did not know. He did say that Jaynes's theory claims to explain about bluffing and the origins of deceit. Now, Levinson said, we can imagine what is real and what is not real, and decide to "go with the not-real." In the bicameral situation, both minds speak, while now, one can hide the other. Someone noted that chimpanzees can practice deceit, but Levinson said that Jaynes was not necessarily saying this trait is phylogenetic.

Someone closed by saying that virtual reality gives you voices in your head and brings this to the forefront, so he thought this might make some of these theories falsifiable. (Of course, knowing you are in a virtual reality would undoubtedly make a difference.)

To summarize various comments from this discussion and elsewhere:

- | On the one hand, Jaynes' theory does explain the preponderance of living, speaking gods in Sumerian and Assyrian texts, the Bible, and the *Odyssey*. It also helps explain schizophrenia.
- | Jaynes eliminates the idea that consciousness is some miraculous gift which was imposed from without, and in a much more humanistic, rational way than the behaviorists do (at least according to some). Jaynes answers the previously unanswerable question: if we are conscious, and animals are not, and we evolved from animals, where did consciousness come from? (Of course, we can also debate whether animals are conscious.)

On the other hand, there are many unanswered questions. Jaynes had implied a follow-up book, but he died five years ago, so he can no longer respond to some of the criticisms of his theories. These include:

- | There is no reason to assume that the difference between "preconscious" and "conscious" is as sharp a distinction as Jaynes takes for granted it is.
- | Jayne's claim that the locus of consciousness can be considered as being anywhere it wants is much disputed.
- | Jaynes dismisses prehistoric China (which does not support his theories), and ignores pre-Columbian America, as well as other areas.
- | There is a fair argument that we achieved a complex language 30,000 years ago, not 3,000 as Jaynes claims.
- | Jaynes shows that consciousness is not necessary to various behaviors, but then he makes the leap to assert that consciousness is *never* associated with these processes.
- | On page 76, Jaynes asserts that the *Iliad* is history, and not a fit subject for literary analysis, because elements of it have been verified historically. (This is similar to Biblical fundamentalists who claim that the existence of historical elements in a work proves the historicity of the whole. Is *Dragnet* historical because Los Angeles exists?) Also, Jaynes does not take the Homer's heroes' athletic feats as seriously as he appears to take their visions, and he seems totally unaware with how epic poetry gets composed. [Alan Scott]
- | Jaynes implies that consciousness itself has an effect on the evolution of the physical brain. This is certainly questionable.
- | Consciousness, while advantageous, also has an evolutionary disadvantage, causing paralysis and indecision in the face of danger.
- | On pages 186-187, Jaynes insists that any subjectivity in ancient language (which would weaken his case) is the imposition of modern sensibility and consciousness upon a non-conscious behavior, but he rarely if ever attempts to adequately support this assertion.
- | Conversely, Jaynes later spends a lot of time reinterpreting ancient records whose translations are ambiguous to support his view, in what can only be considered a subjective manner, primarily by assertion. Similarly, Jaynes makes references to "bicameral civilizations" as established fact rather than the thing he is trying to establish.
- | On page 207, Jaynes confuses conciliation with compromise and negotiation. [Alan Scott]
- | Later on the same page, Jaynes says that when a priestly hierarchy (such as those he contends are expressions of preconscious bicameral societies) is disturbed, the disturbances get exaggerated in ways that "in a police state, would not occur." Actually, in a police state this is just how they *do* occur.

(Final comment: In *Snow Crash*, Neal Stephenson suggests that modern consciousness was forced into existence by Enki, who devised an incantation whose effect was to force his subjects into consciousness. Before this, everyone spoke the primordial language of the brain, a language which is inborn and does not have to be learned. Enki's incantation cut its hearers off from the primordial language, and thereafter human languages began to diverge and multiply. First of all, while Noam Chomsky proposed that all human languages can be reduced to a basic "deep structure" rooted in the physiology of the brain, no neurologist or cognitive scientist believes that this "deep structure" could actually be spoken aloud in a language that everyone would understand, regardless of their native tongue. And the idea that there was an actual virus fired off in Sumer is even more questionable. How would it have gotten to South America before the Spanish—or is the claim it did not?)

I really enjoyed this panel, I think the audience did also, and I hope that future Boskones will do this with other theories.

(One gripe: we were in a room scheduled for a charity event after us, and people started coming in and setting up at least fifteen minutes before the end of the hour, interrupting us, leaving the door open and letting hall noise come in, and so on. This encouraged people waiting in the hall to also come in early, and in general made the last ten minutes much less productive than they might have been.)

Next year's Boskone will be February 18-20, 2000, in Framingham, Massachusetts.

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