Boskone 37
A convention report by Evelyn C. Leeper
with additional material by Mark R. Leeper
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In spite of all efforts by the weather gods, Boskone 37 was held February 18-20, 2000, in Framingham, Massachusetts. Our drive up, which takes five hours on a good day, took ten hours as we drove through snow, slush, rain, sleet, and a traffic jam which appeared to pack every car from a hundred-mile radius around New Haven onto a ten-mile stretch of I-95. It did not seem to keep away a lot of people, though, as the warm body count was still almost 800.

Because we arrived late--after midnight--we missed the Friday night programming, art show reception, and parties.

The Dealers Room was "same old, same old," with all the usual dealers in their usual places. Someday they will re-arrange the room and freak everyone out. I did find a copy of Mike Resnick's *Purgatory* to complete the triptych, and a couple of Tor Doubles I was looking for.

Maybe it was because I was tired from the drive up, or maybe the programming was not as exciting as previously, or maybe I'm just getting old, but I attended fewer panels than usual. But even so, there were conflicts, and so Mark wrote up a description of the panel on Wells because I could not attend it.

The Science Fiction of H. G. Wells
Saturday, 11AM
Ellen Asher, Tom Kidd, Sharon Lee, Mark R. Leeper, Steve Miller, Melissa Scott
written by Mark R. Leeper

(It seems to me there were only five of us. I thing Scott was not there.)

Tom Kidd put out two of his paintings up illustrating Wells. I wished I had with me my origami Martian War Machines.

I mentioned that there are eight basic novels of Wells. They are the seven novels that have been collected in a single well-known anthology (*War of the Worlds*, *The Time Machine*, *First Men in the Moon*, *Island of Dr. Moreau*, *Invisible Man*, *Food of the Gods*, and *In the Days of the Comet*) and I would add *When the Sleeper Wakes*.

One person complained he saw a chauvinism in Wells. In *Island of Dr. Moreau*, he saw a sort of belief that that human form was ideal. One of the panelists pointed out it was only Moreau who held that opinion and he was the villain. In a larger sense, I reminded people that he may be the villain, but he also was symbolic of God. In fact, the novel seems to be a complaint about the relationship of God and man.

The discussion centered around how readable Wells is today. Does he stand up to rereading? Is he recommendable to younger readers? There was some disagreement on whether Wells is recommendable. It was agreed that his writing is good within limits. His characters are in fact very thin. Usually you learn almost nothing about his first-person character. And frequently other characters are named only by occupation: "The gunner said..." But there are certainly scenes he writes that are dramatic. Do young writers still find him exciting? It is probably somewhat less so in the post-"Star-Wars' era, but many young people do find he still stands up. I find him exciting and one younger reader who was in the audience said he enjoyed Wells. But of course he had come to a panel about Wells, so it could be expected that he would be a fan.

I talked a bit about Wells's "Future History." It is really in four phases:

1. Extended war, when the means to stop have been lost
2. Technological Utopia, with perhaps not all participating
3. Eloi/Morlock split
4. Dying of humanity give way to age of mega-crustaceans

Wells had a sort of pessimism about the future, at least for the short term, which may have been the basis of a broader pessimism in later science fiction, as exemplified by Brunner and others.

In general, when it came to inventions, if Wells envisioned it and it was good, it is impractical; if it was bad it probably has already been done. Good things that are impractical include the time machine, the anti-gravity machine, boom food, and intelligence via surgery. Bad things that have mostly been accomplished include heat rays, airship raids, the atomic bomb (he coined the phrase in 1913 in *The World Set Free*; he even said the bombs worked by "chain reaction"), germ warfare, and tanks.

I commented on some of his fantasy (in spite of the name of the panel). For example, there is "Pollock and the Porrah Man," about a man haunted to death by a curse. "The Red Room" prefigures some of Stephen King's themes. There is "The Man Who Could Work Miracles" and "The Truth about Pycroft," in which a curse makes a man weightless. "The Flowering of a Strange Orchid" has a vampire plant. And there is "Empire of the Ants."

I also announced that I would be teaching the Martian War Machine in the origami session.

[Thanks for the write-up, Mark.]

J. R. R. Tolkien -- Modernist
Saturday, 11AM
James D. Macdonald, Patrick Nielsen Hayden (m), Michael Swanwick, Jo Walton

"Was J. R. R. Tolkien a modernist? Several of the panel members think so. The panel discusses the reasons for and against considering Tolkien a modernist."

Nielsen Hayden began by summarizing High Modernism as being exemplified by James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound, all of whom were deeply affected by World War I. J. R. R. Tolkien was also affected--he was in the trenches. The Modernists were deeply nostalgic for an older order and coherency and wanted to write "immense world-girdling works of art": Pound wrote the Cantos, Joyce wrote *Finnegans Wake*, Eliot wrote "The Waste Land," and Tolkien wrote *The Lord of the Rings*.

We have narrow definitions of formal innovation, and so while we recognize the innovation of Pound, Joyce, and Eliot, we do not recognize Tolkien's innovation. Tolkien addressed himself to the post-industrial reader. Walton agreed that there was something in that. Eliot, in "The Waste Land") says, "With these fragments I've shored up my ruins." Tolkien goes back to before the ruins, as does W. H. Auden. And she noted that Pound also translated the Old English poem "The Seafarer."

Swanwick joined in, saying "I have a lot to say about it, all contradictory." He noted that Auden gave

the only contemporary favorable review of *The Lord of the Rings*. More typical was the negative response by Edmund Wilson in his review, "Oo, Those Awful Orcs." "The twentieth century," Swanwick said, "is a slow sick war fought between modernism and Tolkien." *The Lord of the Rings* has "structure, moral tone, and a search for comfortable ethical meaning" which is what the Modernists fought against. But Tolkien won out against the High Modernist movement.

Nielsen Hayden felt this ignored important aspects of Tolkien. For example, the birthday party and the scouring of the shire provide a contrast to high moral parts surrounding them, and are rich with irony. He said that all this really comes out through the appendices, which he compared to writing in boxes around the text (like the Talmud?). And this is "even leaving aside all the 'Books of Lost Laundry Lists' that have been published since Tolkien's death."

Macdonald thought that the way Tolkien resembles the Modernists is that one of the characters is the language, but added, "Not everyone who writes in the twentieth century is a Modernist."

From the audience, Graydon Sanders suggested that one of the cohesive things about the Modernists is that they are a reaction against the constant benevolence of God. They collectively embraced geology and Darwin. As he put it, "The Hobbits are a Libertarian utopia." But Swanwick noted that they do have sheriffs and mayors.

Swanwick also said, "[The Modernists] were also adamantly atheistic," to which Nielsen Hayden immediately responded, "Eliot!?!" "Not Eliot," Swanwick acknowledged, but he also added that "Tolkien was devout in a way even C. S. Lewis was not." Everyone in *The Lord of the Rings* was in the process of losing everything they valued.

To all this, Nielsen Hayden observed, "You're a sufficiently good reader that you can't help but contradict yourself." Swanwick did not deny this. Swanwick elaborated that in Tolkien, the good people are those who surrender their will (to God) and in the end they have to go across the Grey Sea (die).

Nielsen Hayden insisted that there were different degrees of atheism and faith in the Modernists. And Macdonald added, "Joyce was a bone-deep Catholic, too." When once asked if he had become a Protestant, Joyce replied, "No, I lost my faith, not my reason." (Of course, I just read in a biography of Joyce that when told his daughter had been seen in church, Joyce said, "Now I know she has lost her mind." One wonders how true either of these stories are.)

Walton said that *The Hobbit* was a children's book, but completely unlike anything else.

Getting back to the basic question, Swanwick said, "Modernism set out to change and fragment and shatter the language to reflect a new shattered reality as they saw it, [but] Tolkien's prose is a very straightforward clean, and uncomplicated prose." Nielsen Hayden, on the other hand, felt that "the Modernists set out with this agenda of blowing up everyone's brain and reprogramming them and it didn't work, but Tolkien did it."

Macdonald noted that Tolkien was very precise in his use of language: some characters use words only of Germanic origin, others only of French, others of both. This, Macdonald said, is using language as a character.

From the audience, Fred Lerner said that in *The Lord of the Rings*, the characters' strength is rooted in the land and the people, as in Kipling. "Which can edge over into a jingoistic nationalism very quickly," Nielsen Hayden noted. Lerner agreed, saying that Kipling avoided this later, and Tolkien has this same basis.

From the audience, Heather Anne Nicholl thought that perhaps we wanted to talk about goal rather form.

Swanwick asked, "If you had caught Joyce reading *The Lord of the Rings*, would he have quickly shoved it under a Mickey Spillane novel?" (I just read recently that Dylan Thomas *was* a big fan of Mickey Spillane.) Faye Ringel (in the audience) said that Edmund Wilson hated them all for their politics rather their writing, with which Debra Doyle agreed, talking about their unstated attitudes toward authority.

Macdonald said that in *The Lord of the Rings*, authority figures are all insane, evil, or weak. and that his earlier comments on the use of French and German words ties in to World War I, with the English-speaking hobbits wondering why they're involved in the conflict in the first place. Saruman's signs are even similar to those in the trenches, being white on black. And Tolkien's armies are World-War-I-sized, not medieval-sized.

Swanwick said, "I'll insert by reversing my basic stand by saying that Tolkien was not a success, but was an abject failure." He wanted to create a mythos, a modern myth cycle, that Brits could draw on, and the "appendices weren't done for narrative structural reasons at all." Nielsen Hayden responded that *all* the Modernists failed to accomplish what they wanted. And Swanwick said, "You can't say Tolkien's a Modernist because he failed at what he tried to do." Walton gave as an example that he failed to write *The Simarillion*.

Lerner felt that "if [Tolkien] was attempting to create a matter of England, then you're premature in assessing him as a failure." And Walton noted that *The Guardian* asked, "How is it that one man became the equivalent of a people in creating a mythology?" Nielsen Hayden pointed out, "This kind of hubris is exactly the kind of hubris that Pound had when he set out to write the Cantos." (Which, someone said, will be in public domain in 2021.)

Nielsen Hayden felt that *The Lord of the Rings* is not internally consistent and is full of contradictory moral messages. Sanders felt that Modernism "was an attempt to bring into being the world they wanted and not deal with the world they had," and hence the contradictory nature would not indicate Modernism.

Ringel thought there were definitely parallels between *The Lord of the Rings* and *Ulysses*, and between *The Simarillion* and *Finnegans Wake*. Walton noted that Poul Anderson's *The Broken Sword* was published at the same time as *The Lord of the Rings*. It was "railroad time" (as in, "When it's time to railroad, you railroad."). Nielsen Hayden noted that *The Broken Sword* is now very little read because it does not meet people's "Tolkien expectations." "You would not call *The Broken Sword* a Modernist work."

Nielsen Hayden observed, "There is a lot more diverse culture in *The Lord of the Rings*," and that this is what distinguishes Tolkien from his many imitators. Walton felt what he established in his imitators was the quest/journey, and the picaresque nature. He was also "Christianizing Ragnarok." Swanwick felt, "There is a moral modesty to the whole thing. The triumph is to do the right thing and then die." This is so different from other Modernists.

Macdonald quoted T. S. Eliot in *Murder in the Cathedral*: "The Last Temptation is the greatest treason--to do the right thing for the wrong reason." Swanwick responded, "Eliot is my nomination for the most boring Catholic ever."

Lerner thought that England's experience in World War II made people more receptive to *The Lord of the Rings*, "coming very close to catastrophe, surviving but losing so much." Walton agreed, adding, "Without the Marshall Plan there wouldn't have been any *The Lord of the Rings*. *The Lord of the Rings* and *1984* shouldn't be in the same universe, never mind being written in the same year." (Nielsen Hayden suggested that Tolkien would, however, have agreed with Orwell's "The Lion and the Unicorn" essay.)

About the basic statement, though, Nielsen Hayden said that Tolkien insisted *The Lord of the Rings*

was not an allegory for World War II, even though it was hard not to read it that way. "I actually think that Tolkien was fibbing a bit there," he said, or using a very narrow definition for the word "allegory."

Someone noted that, unlike the Modernists, Tolkien thinks people do not have to be redesigned. Nielsen Hayden countered that the High Modernists were trying to redesign art, not necessarily people.

Swanwick said that all this missed what he thought was the most cogent point, which was "the peripheral materials making it a Modernist [work]." Someone in the audience pointed out that Hobbits do ballad hall songs, pastorals, and idylls in iambic tetrameter, while Elves do dactylics, Ents do long, rambling lines, and Orcs do lots of spondees strung together. Ed Meskys added that Marion Zimmer Bradley found the source for one of the Hobbits' songs in an Irish folk song, complete with the same break in scansion.

Nielsen Hayden said that one reason he thought the topic of Tolkien as a Modernist was good was that it helped to "get us away from talking abut Tolkien in term of William bloody Morris, E. R. Eddison, Mervyn Peake," etc. Swanwick though we were attempting to make Tolkien a Modernist, since we have this notion that "Good = Modernist." Nielsen Hayden said his goal was narrower: "I want to rescue Tolkien from the bloody stereotypes of mythopoeic types."

What Makes a Good Award? A Look at Hugos, Nebulas, and Others
Saturday, 12N
Jim Mann, Mark L. Olson

"If it is granted that some art is better than other art, then what criteria might plausibly be employed to decide what's good? Is it reasonable that different awards with different electorates, while all allegedly for The Best, may in fact be looking for different things? How do the existing awards work? Are there clear trends in what they select? Are there clear failure modes they tend to fall into? Take a look at the various awards' track records."

I arrived late for this, but the first part was apparently just explaining to the eight people in the audience how the Hugos are awarded. Of some interest was the statistic that about 500 nominate in the most popular categories (Novel and Dramatic Presentation), and between 500 and 1000 cast votes.

Then they explained the Nebulas, which were even more complicated, what with a two-year window of eligibility (with each book having a one-year window--the eligibility year runs from when book is published). Ten recommendations (from active members only--about 500) gets you on the preliminary ballot. The members vote for the top five for short list, which can also include one from the jury. Then finally the short list is voted on (by about 200-300).

Ellen Asher thought that for the Hugos, at least, authors who show up at conventions have an advantage. Mann said that this might be true in the sense that if he hears someone on a panel who sounds good, he might read his/her books, widening their audience. Olson noted that most clubs have Hugo discussions. He also observed that authors at conventions can get a negative reaction as well. George Flynn and Olson both thought having a series helps (e.g., Anne McCaffrey). Having a "name" helps (e.g., Isaac Asimov, Harlan Ellison).

Also, "big, big objects" win (e.g., *Ringworld*). (I speculated that this was because they generated a gravitational field that sucks in votes.)

It was noted that fantasy does not win Hugos. (There are a few exceptions, all in short fiction). And the World Fantasy Award winners are fairly forgettable.

There was some question as to whether people should be voting for enjoyment, or for literary quality.

Someone suggested that we should encourage people *not* to vote if they are unfamiliar with the category, but nominating, even with limited knowledge, is okay.

The panelists thought that likely Hugo nominees this year included Greg Bear's *Darwin's Radio*, Lois McMaster Bujold's *A Civil Campaign*, Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Shadow*, Neal Stephenson's *Cryptonomicon*, and Vernor Vinge's *A Deepness in the Sky*.

As far as other awards, the Philip K. Dick Award was judged fairly good (i.e., the books that win are worth reading). The British Arthur C. Clarke award is also a good metric. The Tiptree Award has a clear agenda, but in spite of that is worth noticing. The *Locus* awards are somewhat ignored.

We also talked a bit about the Sidewise Awards (for alternate history). I obviously think the award is worthwhile, but more interesting is the eligibility rule: a work is eligible in its first year of United States publication, or whenever most of the jury can get it, whichever comes first. So a book published in Britain in 1995 may not be considered until 1997 if it is hard to get. (Yes, we know about *amazon.co.uk*, but we have no great budget.)

Everything You Know Is Wrong: SF That Questions Reality
Saturday, 2PM
John R. Douglas, David G. Hartwell, Daniel Kimmel, Evelyn C. Leeper (m)

"Over the years, a number of SF works have played with reality. Phil Dick wrote many novels asking what is real. The trend has accelerated recently, to the point where even wildly popular movies like The *Truman Show*, *Pleasantville*, and *The Matrix* are looking at similar issues. The panel discusses SF that plays with reality. What are the seminal works in this subgenre? Is it really getting more popular now? If so, why?

[This section contains mild spoilers for some films, basically by their very inclusion.]

I was the person who suggested this panel, prompted by the following from Mason Barge (*rec.arts.movies.current-films*, June 7, 1999):

> This separate reality issue is an interesting phenomenon. I think it has been encouraged by the internet (duh!). A lot of people who play computer games have felt for short or extended periods that their **real** life lies in the computer or on the net, while their day-to-day existence is just a vehicle supporting their life on-line. And to a lesser degree, it's encouraged by the anima-laden email and internet relationships, being able to be treated as a character you make up without any of the clues to who you are that come from in-person socialization.
>
> Anyway, my notes on five movies:
>
> *Matrix*: The reality we perceive is false. There is a real and somewhat similar reality where our bodies exist, and the goal of the movie is to return to that "actual" reality. This is an old philosophical/religious concept ("La Vida Es Sueno"--life is a dream) combined with a rather populist vision of returning to our roots.
>
> *eXistenZ*: Once we leave actual reality, we become unable to tell whether or not the reality we perceive is actual, or whether we are still in the Game. A straight paranoia play. The goal is to end the delusional and psychotic state induced by the Game. This is a "forbidden apple" or "Pandora's box" type drama--I think they even mention the legend of Pandora in the movie. The ethos is anti-fantasy. The mode is basically horror-movie.
>
> *The 13th Floor*: To me, this is the most profound of the bunch, as it posits the possibility

that we don't exist at all, but are merely a bunch of electrons in a simulacrum of some other reality. The goal is to become real--I suppose the myth involved is Pinocchio (or possibly bronze age man-becomes-god myth, prevalent in at least Roman and Egyptian religions, and many Eastern ones). But this is really the most novel of all of this genre. We have become, in effect, HAL (from 2001). The ethos is humanistic, but the humans involved aren't really human.

Dark City: This one, like *The Truman Show*, posited a "real" reality rather than a cyber-reality. Although the action took place on a spacecraft of some sort and the manipulation was done by aliens, the humans were actually human and manipulation of consciousness was accomplished by drugs and some sort of brainwashing. But the people lived in a physical environment. Otherwise, it was very similar to *The Matrix*. A more traditional sci-fi film combined with a 30's whodunit plot (until the revelation at the end) and some impressionist/futurist art direction. The ethos is humanistic with real humans trying break free of alien masters.

The Truman Show: The reality we perceive is true, but our experience has been manipulated by other human beings to change our personality by restricting our field of knowledge and experience. The myth here is Soviet-Nazi propaganda, or (less pejoratively) manipulation of personality by environment, and the individual finding liberation by refusing to accept appearances--somewhere between *1984* and *The Wizard of Oz*. This is by far the least sci-fi, as the rules of physics and current existence are followed much more closely. There is neither hi-tech brainwashing nor cyber-reality, as Truman lives in a sophisticated biodome, with real actors playing the parts. The thematic material is quite different from the others, also, as it is more self-consciously political and comes out closer to *Brazil* than to *The Matrix* or *The 13th Floor*. The psychology is also more down-to-earth, showing basically a B.F. Skinner experiment gone berserk.

-- Mason Barge

To this I added *Pleasantville* described as "The reality we perceive is false, and we know it, but no one else does."

Douglas said that as far as literary roots went, the master of this genre was Philip K. Dick. Hartwell agreed, but noted that Henry Kuttner and A. E. Van Vogt also used these ideas, and that this sort of paranoia was in 1950s films as well, such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *Invaders from Mars*, and *I Married a Monster from Outer Space*. So we cannot actually be sure if the writers of these films were influenced by old bad movies or old bad stories or old good stories. (Well, actually, for *The 13th Floor* we can, since it was based on an old novel, Daniel F. Galouye's *Simulacron-3*.)

There was a "slacking-off" of these in the 1960s, which the panelists attributed to the use of drugs as a replacement. Two works that did appear in that period were "Faith of Our Fathers" by Philip K. Dick and "The Reality Trip" by Norman Spinrad.

Douglas said that in the last five to ten years we have achieved the ability to make everything look hyperreal, to mix reality and fiction in ways that we could not before. Woody Allen's *Zelig* was a forerunner of the trend, and a more notable recent example was *Contact*, in which President Clinton appeared to be part of the movie.

As another example of how this genre did not suddenly appear in films only in the last couple of years, Kimmel mentioned *Total Recall*.

Douglas said that some of these premises, particularly that of information about reality were much older, going back to E. M. Forester's "The Machine Stops," George Orwell's *1984*, and Yvgeny

Zmayatin's *We*. And Hartwell thought the first versions of this were in the 1940s in Kuttner's work, but even Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* could be considered to be part of this.

Kimmel mentioned that in some alternate histories where people change reality, and Hartwell mentioned J. W. Dunne's theory of time with decision splits (from 1929). (This last reference was really spooky, because it was the third reference to Dunne's theory that I had heard in the last week. The other two came within a half hour of each other, one in a collection essays by Jorge Luis Borges, and the other in a short story by Damon Knight from a collection I picked up for a break from the Borges.)

Even in films that do not appear to fit in this category, the concept that reality is very subjective shows up a lot. Films such as *The Sixth Sense*, *The Stunt Man*, *Rashomon*, *The Usual Suspects*, *The Sting*, *The Lathe of Heaven*, and even *Dallas* (the television series) were mentioned. Kimmel said that in all of these, the basic plot is the discovery of error. Even the scene in *Brazil* in which a pan that you think is going down a street turns out to be of a table-top model qualifies.

Why do these appeal? Douglas said, "Everyone agrees there is a consensus reality, but no one agrees what it is." Hartwell thought they played on the fact that "we need to assume our ability to predict consensus reality." Kimmel felt the subversive nature of these stories made them popular. Someone in the audience suggested that a consensus reality where *amazon.com* is worth more then General Motors makes *The Matrix* seem realistic. Hartwell said that on a philosophical level, determinism makes things reassuring. Kimmel thought that was part of the appeal of Isaac Asimov's psychohistory.

Someone said that all these supply an "explanation of the shadows at the edges of our vision." People also suggested time-reversal books (*Time's Arrow* by Martin Amis and *Counterclock World* by Philip K. Dick) were related to this. Hartwell said that "absurdity has power," and absurdity comes from as far back as *Alice in Wonderland*.

Someone asked about Roger Zelazny's "Amber" series, which led to mention of Gregory Maguire's *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* and *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister*, John P. Marquand's *The Late George Apley*, and so on. Some people thought these were examples of reductio ad absurdum of 20th century psychology, but the panel seems to think they were merely off-shoots of the "unreliable narrator." Kimmel noted in this regard that there is a sort of unspoken rule that flashbacks must be accurate, but even here he could name at least one work that violates this successfully.

Various side topics mentioned Lao Tse's conundrum of the philosopher and the butterfly, the story ending "I woke up and it was all a dream," and the "fourth wall" in theater. Examples of some of these given were Woody Allen's *Purple Rose of Cairo*, *Arcadia* by Tom Stoppard; the upcoming *Me, Myself, and I*; *Being John Malkovich*; the film *Planet of the Apes*; the film *Penn and Teller Get Killed*; *The Universe Between*; Magritte's paintings, trompe l'oeil; and the works of M. C. Escher.

Masters of Fantasy: Ray Harryhausen and Willis O'Brien
Saturday, 3PM
Bob Eggleton, Daniel Kimmel, Mark R. Leeper, Jim Mann (m)

[There was a hand-out from Leeper, available at *http://www.geocities.com/evelynleeper/obrien.htm*.]

[This panel was interrupted by a faulty fire alarm which blared for about ten minutes, during which no discussion could take place.]

Kimmel started by saying, "I like these films, but I'm not willing to die for them," adding that without Bob Devney (who was unable to attend Boskone), it is as if no one said anything. (What am I, chopped liver?)

(Somewhat off-topic, but I just saw a documentary on Jackie Chan in which someone said that Jackie Chan was the only actor willing to die for his fans.)

Kimmel said that O'Brien did not originate stop-motion photography; "The Automatic Moving Company" (1903) had stop motion. Leeper noted that *King Kong* was the *Star Wars* of its time in that it may not have originated the techniques, but it brought them into full flower. He also noted that *King Kong* saved RKO from bankruptcy. (I noted that O'Brien's short films show the progression of his technique, with each film adding more "tricks.")

For those unfamiliar with the history of O'Brien and Harryhausen, Eggleton said that when Harryhausen met O'Brien, O'Brien told Harryhausen to learn anatomy, etc., and then took him as an apprentice.

Regarding O'Brien, his *Lost World* was cut down after its first release, and after *King Kong*, he never achieved that level again. Eggleton said that when he was in failing health in the 1950s, he became involved in a project called "King Kong Versus Frankenstein," in which something part rhinoceros, part something else, meets King Kong in San Francisco. Someone else was working on "Godzilla Versus Prometheus," so Toho combined the two into *King Kong Versus Godzilla*. In that film the battle on Mt. Fuji was filmed partly in stop-motion, but basically it was all men in suits. O'Brien tried to sue over the use of his name on this (in his opinion) abomination, but died before the suit was settled. *Valley of Gwangi* was based on O'Brien's script, but another project, *War Eagles*, never happened. (The fact that it was pitched around World War II, when we were fighting the "German eagle," might have made companies leery of this as escapism.)

Leeper noted that as the years went on, O'Brien's technique did not improve enough to compete with Harryhausen. Mann agreed, saying that Harryhausen is much better known, and Eggleton added that Harryhausen is also more business-savvy. Kimmel agreed, noting that in "the Dream Factory" (one of Hollywood's many nicknames), the key word is "factory."

Leeper said that Charles Schneer teamed with Harryhausen early on. Eggleton said that in the 1950s Harryhausen did monster films, but then in the 1960s his work became more mythological or literature-based. The non-effects scenes were not as good. Kimmel says that Harryhausen laughed at the ten minutes of special effects credits at the end of *Superman*; when he did it, he did it alone (though Eggleton noted he did hire Jim Danforth at one point).

I asked the panel the obvious question: What is your favorite Ray Harryhausen film? Kimmel picked *Jason and the Argonauts*. Leeper and Mann both said that it was very close between *Jason and the Argonauts* and *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* with Leeper giving the edge to *Jason and the Argonauts* and Mann *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad*. Eggleton chose *Golden Voyage of Sinbad*, because that was the first one he saw in a theater.

Someone asked, "Is stop motion dead?" Probably. The trailer for *Dinosaur* currently running in theaters shows just how powerful CGI has become, and Kimmel thought that the CGI in *Stuart Little* was very good. But Eggleton said that Dennis Muren (who supervised the visual effects for such films as *Jurassic Park* and *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace*) says that Harryhausen's creations have more personality than anything he has done. Kimmel said this is because Harryhausen does something different with the effect each time, and Mann added, "It's the extra --useless' motions that give the characters the personality." Leeper thought, however, that sometimes this is carried to extremes, and Mann agreed, saying that when the Cyclops dies in *Jason and the Argonauts*, it is like the Laurence Olivier death scene in *Hamlet*.

Of course, good films need to have a good script, good acting, etc. (*King Kong* was certainly helped by Max Steiner's ground-breaking score.) Mann said that *Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger* was hurt by the fact it is a pale shadow of the earlier films, with a weak script and an Idiot plot. Patrick Wayne

was really popular then, but now just detracts from the film.

Eggleton said that the bottom line today is that Ray Harryhausen went to ILM, saw go-motion, and retired to work exclusively on sculpture.

A Really Good Year: 1999 Year in Review
Saturday, 5PM
Claire Anderson, David Hartwell, Daniel Kimmel, Evelyn C. Leeper (m), Mark L. Olson

[Kathryn Cramer was supposed to be on this panel, but by common agreement, she was replaced by David Hartwell.]

Contrary to my usual note-taking practice, I took notes for this by scribbling names on a piece of paper rather than directly into the palmtop. And what you'll get will be mostly lists of suggestions, occasionally with who suggested them.

For novel, I looked at the list on the *Locus* web site for what books appeared most often in mainstream "Best of the Year" lists, and these were Neal Stephenson's *Cryptonomicon* (9 mentions--I just read it, and I would say it is science fiction), J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (8), Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Shadow* (5), Greg Bear's *Darwin's Radio* (4), Thomas Harris's *Hannibal* (4), and Jonathan Lethem's *Girl in Landscape* (4).

The full list of recommended novels was:

- John Barnes's *Finity*
- Greg Bear's *Darwin's Radio*
- Lois McMaster Bujold's *A Civil Campaign*
- Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Shadow*
- Michael Cisco's *The Divinity Student*
- Brendan DuBois's *Resurrection Day*
- Greg Egan's *Teranesia*
- Thomas Harris's *Hannibal*
- J. Gregory Keyes's *A Calculus of Angels* (second in a trilogy)
- Jonathan Lethem's *Girl in Landscape*
- Ken MacLeod's *The Cassini Division* (part of a series, but can be read stand-alone)
- Sean McMullen's *Souls in the Great Machine*
- China Miéville's *King Rat*
- Pat Murphy's *There and Back Again*
- J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*
- Neal Stephenson's *Cryptonomicon*
- S. M. Stirling's *Against the Tide of Years* (second book of a trilogy)
- Judith Tarr and Harry Turtledove's *Household Gods*
- Vernor Vinge's *A Deepness in the Sky* (part of a series, but can be read stand-alone)
- Gene Wolfe's *On Blue's Waters*

The likely Hugo nominees seem to be Greg Bear's *Darwin's Radio*, Lois McMaster Bujold's *A Civil Campaign*, Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Shadow*, and Vernor Vinge's *A Deepness in the Sky*, with J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* and Neal Stephenson's *Cryptonomicon* as strong contenders as well.

Short fiction was done without much regard for the three official Hugo categories, or any similar Nebula ones, but I've used *Locus*'s list to take a first stab at categorizing them:

- Stephen Baxter's "Spindrift" (short story, *Asimov's*, March)
- Terry Bisson's "macs" (short story, *F&SF*, October/November)

- Michael Burstein's "Reality Check" (novella, *Analog*, November)
- Greg Egan's "Border Guards" (novelette, *Interzone*, October)
- Bill Johnson's "Vaults of Permian Love" (novelette, *Analog*, May)
- Ian MacLeod's "The Chop Girl" (novelette, *Asimov's*, December)
- Elizabeth Malartre's "Evolution Never Sleeps" (short story, *Asimov's*, July)
- Geoff Ryman's "Everywhere" (short story, *Interzone*, February)
- Brian Stableford's "The Oracle" (novelette, *Asimov's*, May)
- Lucy Sussex's "The Queen of Erewhon" (novelette, *F&SF*, September)
- Peter Crowther's anthology *Moonshots*

Recommended related books included Eric Leif Davin's *Pioneers of Wonder: Conversations with the Founders of Science Fiction*, Frank Robinson's *Science Fiction of the 20th Century*, *The Science of Discworld* (recommended by Mark Olson, but for which I cannot seem to find any listing), and the *Minicon 34 Restaurant Guide*.

For dramatic presentation I have slightly better notes as to who suggested the various works:

- *Being John Malkovich* (CA, DK, EL)
- *Bicentennial Man* (DK)
- *Blast from the Past* (DK)
- *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: "Hush" (DK)
- *Dogma* (EL)
- *eXistenZ* (CA, DK, EL)
- *Free Enterprise* (video) (DK)
- *Galaxy Quest* (CA, DK)
- "George Lucas in Love" (recommended by DK afterwards, and I would second that) (http://www.mediatrip.com/cgi-bin/filter/_lucas|lucas)
- *The Green Mile* (EL)
- *The Iron Giant* (DK, EL)
- *Magnolia* (EL)
- *The Matrix* (CA, DK, MO)
- *The Mummy* (DK)
- *October Sky* (EL)
- *Princess Mononoke* (CA) (1997, but eligible as 1999 was its first year in English)
- *The Sixth Sense* (EL)
- *Sleepy Hollow* (EL)
- *South Park* (DK, EL)
- *The Sticky Fingers of Time* (CA, DK) (but this is actually a 1997 movie)
- *Stir of Echoes* (?)
- *The 13th Floor* (EL)
- *Titus* (DK, EL) (I hadn't seen it before Boskone, but I have since and figure I can add my recommendation post hoc)
- "Cell" (play at Aussiecon Three) (EL)

A plea to remember book editors when filling in the Professional Editor category was made--by me, not the editors.

Guest of Honor Speech
Saturday, 9PM
Michael Swanwick

Contrary to any previous year, this started on time, so we missed the first five or ten minutes. (We had dinner with a friend of Mark's from high school whom he had not seen in over thirty years.)

Swanwick was asking, "What makes science fiction worth it?" It cannot be the money--he gave the

example of John Brunner, who was successful, but died broke. "Is this anyway for an adult to make a living?"

He digressed temporarily to describe seeing Galileo's mummified middle finger in Rome, which it turns out is pointed directly toward the Vatican. (I doubt Galileo would have approved.) Swanwick claimed that "the Kansas Board of Education . . . [sorry] . . . the Inquisition" told him he could only teach both systems, not that he could not teach his.

Swanwick's conclusion? "Stories are the basic unit of comprehension. Those who create them dictate the shape of the world. They are shamans."

Parties
Saturday, 10PM

We attended the Readercon and Boston in 2004 parties, which were both pretty low-key. The UK in 2005 was interesting, since they had not actually decided between Glasgow and Brighton. I would prefer Brighton--the hotels are within easy walking distance.

Is Science Fiction Sublime?
Sunday, 10AM
Jeffrey Carver, Hal Clement, Thomas A. Easton, Michael F. Flynn, Alexander Jablokov

"David Nye, in his essay --The American Technological Sublime,' said --The sublime underlies [the] enthusiasm for technology. One of the most powerful human emotions, when experienced by large groups the sublime can weld society together. ... The sublime taps into fundamental hopes and fears. ... it is an essentially religious feeling, aroused by the confrontation with impressive objects, such as Niagara Falls ... or the earth-shaking launch of a space shuttle. The technological sublime is an integral part of contemporary consciousness, and its emergence and exfoliation into several distinct forms during the past two centuries is inscribed within public life. ... the sublime represents a way to reinvest ... the works of men with transcendent significance.' As a European literary notion, it represented the terror and awe aroused by thunderstorms and Grand Canyons that liberated the mind from mundanity. For Kant, --the feeling of the sublime is really the feeling of our own inner powers.' Nye uses the concept to follow the history of technology in America from the dawn of the railroads (early 1800s) on and to illuminate our responses to grand technological achievements. It is possible to describe Verne and Wells and Gernsback and their heirs as expressing the sublime emotion response to technology."

Easton began by observing that the adjective "sublime" has a religious connotation. Flynn said its derivation was "sub-limus"--below the line or threshold, as in "below the threshold of rationality." It is a "response of awe, wonder, and terror in the face of natural phenomena." Nye expands this to a response to human creations (such as a cathedral, a sphinx, a space launch, etc.) Jablokov seemed to feel that the technological emphasis was misplaced, saying, "The goal of humanity was to invent the railroad and everything after that was overshooting."

Jablokov asked if we are we talking about the thing (science fiction or the book) itself or what it is describing. For example, tragedy is about pity and terror, and it is the performance of a play that would arouse the feeling. Easton felt it was the response to the book. Carver concurred, saying "I get a whiff of that sense of wonder and awe by just looking at the spines of the books." Clement wondered if this was the tree in the forest question. He felt it was a matter of definition. I suggested that it is the writing, because two authors can describe the same thing, and one achieves sublimity while the other does not.

Necessary components seemed to be scale, impressiveness, intensity, and richness. In mythological studies, the sublime is defined as "that which produces a moment of participation in the emotional unity of the universe."

Carver said, "If I haven't achieved a sense of the sublime in the reader at some point of the book, I have failed." Flynn gave a example for him, of Harry Turtledove's Pepys discovering evolution through the Sims: "Participation in the universe, and a sudden insight." (That reminded me of the scene in *The Miracle Worker* in which Helen Keller realized that those strange hand motions were really names for things in the real world.)

Someone said that with a book, at least the author has experienced it, but the panelists noted that what may be sublime for the author may not be sublime for the author, and vice versa. C. S. Lewis touched on this in his *Experiment in Criticism*, in his comments about how different readers react differently to the same work.

Clement gave as an example of a possibly sublime moment the sentence "The ocean was mostly water that far inland" (from his own *Close to Critical*).

Someone said that landscapes are frightening until they are safe enough to visit, *then* they become sublime. Ramona [last name unknown] in the audience thought it was a question of whether you are translating and adrenaline response positively or negatively. Panelists thought it there was also the opposition of the fear of something that breaks out of ordinary life versus neophilia. Someone thought that what man can do is terrifying to some people, and that is what science fiction is. Someone else said that science fiction is a sublime response to the universe.

Carver said that it was not just science fiction literature that could be sublime, but also art, giving the example of Richard Powers's covers. Someone asked if there could be sublime art on a convention art show, and the response was "In a good art show, yes." (Most art shows, however, fail this test.)

Jablokov said, "Every book starts being part of the Great Conversation of science fiction." Easton asked, "What unifies the conversation?" He suggested that "science fiction is the literature of the age of technology." Jablokov said, "Before the 20th century had gotten into gear it was easier to celebrate technology as a positive force." The response to World War I in fiction (and science fiction) was a European response, while the response to World War II was more global. (He noted in passing that Chernobyl and the Korean DMZ are filled with scarce wildlife because it is too dangerous for people to go there. The most dangerous thing for an area is for people to go there.)

Someone in the audience summarized some of this by saying, "Science fiction reflects the unease as well as the hope." It was noted that the mythos of peaceful, wild pre-industrial human has been destroyed lately.

Does the New Wave and Cyberpunk signal a turning-away from the sublime? Some thought they did, and that that is why there was a negative reaction to them. Easton said, "Sublimity fades as the technology gets older," and someone (Carver?) described this as "sucking the sublime out of it." Carver still finds sublimity in the replay of Apollo 11, or the scene of Gandalf explaining the history of the Rings of Power.

SF and the Mainstream: A Dialog
Sunday, 11AM
Patrick Nielsen Hayden, Michael Swanwick

"Many people talk about which SF and fantasy authors have been influenced by which other SF and fantasy authors. But many have also been influenced by mainstream writers. This dialog explores the influence mainstream books have had on SF."

Nielsen Hayden said that he suggested his earlier topic (Modernism) because he felt that we (readers, con-goers, . . .) were too focused on science fiction, that readers and writers read too much science fiction and too little else. In the Golden Age, he said, Robert A. Heinlein and John W. Campbell, Jr., were trying to raise level of science fiction to that of *Colliers* magazine, but today's editors and

writers have no such goal.

Swanwick agreed, saying, "If you looked at Heinlein's prose, you saw Hemingway's fingerprints all over it." And he added that "science fiction was always trying to live up to mainstream models and learn from them." But also, Swanwick noted, "Science fiction has always existed in opposition to the mainstream," and later, "Fantasy is also in opposition, but in a different kind of opposition."

Nielsen Hayden pointed out, "Mysteries don't live in opposition to the mainstream." But the futuristic nature of much science fiction leads to peculiarities; Nielsen Hayden noted, "Copy editors sometimes translate everything in a possible future into the subjunctive." Swanwick's copy editor story was for "The Changeling's Tale," where the copy editor changed all the less familiar words: "besom" to "broom," etc. He said that one thing copy editors do not always know is that fantasy is a refuge for those who like ornate prose. Nielsen Hayden said that in fantasy, characters talk like they do in Jane Austen novels, and fantasy is the only place you can do that seriously.

Not everyone sees it this way. Greg Benford supposedly said, "Fantasy is just code for women." And Gardner Dozois does not think fantasy belongs with science fiction (on the Hugo ballot, in bookstores, etc.). However, Nielsen Hayden disagreed, saying that the readership for fantasy and science fiction is pretty much the same (he claims an 80% overlap). And in general, author loyalty is more persistent than genre loyalty (which is probably why authors such as Swanwick can be successful in both genres).

Nielsen Hayden said that many people subscribe to the "Furniture Theory of Genre": "If it has swords, it's fantasy."

Swanwick said that it used to be that fantasy was hard to publish, but fantasy writers discovered that science fiction was easy to publish and you could fake it.

I asked if it was really true that writers read mostly science fiction (since it seems to me that most were widely read). Nielsen Hayden said that nowadays it is true, but earlier the writers had to read mainstream. Swanwick put it more bluntly: "We're in the back of the class with the kids who don't do their homework and say --fuck.'" (On the other hand, the mainstream is somewhat strange as well. Apparently Martin Amis was condemned by his contemporaries for having his teeth fixed.)

There are some science fiction writers who do read mainstream. Swanwick said that the biggest influence on Gene Wolfe was probably Marcel Proust. When asked by aspiring writers what they should read, Wolfe recommends the King James Bible, and says that most people never come back. *Swann's Way* is also good, and interesting. But if he were in the mainstream, he would have to keep up with (lesser) influences.

Nielsen Hayden said that many mainstream authors try to dabble in science fiction, and even Norman Mailer has an unpublished science fiction novel. "He's like octoroon fan, actually," was how he described Mailer.

In the audience, Fred Lerner suggested that earlier writers were largely self-educated, and hence better-read. Nielsen Hayden agreed in part, but pointed out that there was also no established science fiction field for them to work in. Lerner felt that newer writers do a more formal study of literature. Swanwick said it was "a field of auto-didacts" and Nielsen Hayden added, "It still is."

From the audience, Greer Gilman said of academia, "You can't get a degree unless it's the same" (i.e., you have to follow the same trends and "rules" as everyone already there). Nielsen Hayden was a bit worried that if Clarion mutated into that, that would kill off science fiction. Maybe, but even with that constraint on the mainstream, Joyce and the other Modernists seemed to manage to re-vitalize literature.

The panelists said that some of the criticism of science fiction versus the mainstream was on the basis of mis-interpreting Ralph Waldo Emerson's dictum, cited as "Write what you know." What he actually said was (paraphrasing), "Don't write what other people have said about immortality. Write what you know about immortality."

Nielsen Hayden wondered, "Was part of the negative reaction to New Wave a feeling it was getting away from our role as an oppositional culture?" J. G. Ballard's New Wave story "The Assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy Considered as a Downhill Motor Race" accepted the mainstream in that it was a direct take-off/homage/copy of Alfred Jarry's "The Passion Considered as an Uphill Bicycle Race," but science fiction readers did not recognize this. (Jarry's work is available at *http://hamp.hampshire.edu/~ngzF92/jarrypub/works/passion.html*.) Nielsen Hayden described science fiction as "storytelling and literature for people who feel profoundly alienated by the mainstream literary culture."

(Several panels seemed to find themselves discussing why there was a negative reaction to new Wave. The previous panel thought it was because the New Wave departed from sublimity. This panel suggested it was an acceptance of the mainstream literary values. Any other suggestions? Is this a reasonable idea for a future panel, she wondered idly.)

Swanwick added that science fiction writing is shaped by fandom. Imagine, he suggested, if mainstream had their own conventions. It would be interesting, but it would also have a salutatory effect on authors to come face to face with their readers. Nielsen Hayden agreed, saying that they now meet only the most adoring of their readers. Swanwick related that John Updike was amazed that someone caught an error in one of his books, but science fiction authors aren't amazed--it happens to them frequently.

"What we call mainstream fiction is the result of paring away . . . getting rid of stories about exterior stuff," according to Nielsen Hayden. "One of the things being bleached out of mainstream literature is didactica." Swanwick said that this was true, and that one of the first things they teach you is to get rid of infodumps, and Nielsen Hayden observed, "Readers *love* infodumps," elaborating with the sarcastic observation that "readers' opposition to infodumps is why James Michener is such an obscure and unpopular writer." If Michener wrote a book about New Hampshire, Nielsen Hayden said, it would start, "The rocks cooled."

Speaking of authors who are working with mainstream ideas, the panelists said that Robert Jordan and Bruce Sterling are both writing "argument fiction" about morals in the real world. This led Nielsen Hayden to say, "I hate the --Science fiction is a literature of ideas' [attitude], as if Proust is not a literature of ideas."

Swanwick said that there has been a big shift in short fiction due to mainstream influences. Stories used to start with paragraphs that tried to get you into them as fast as possible with a lot of information in a variety of techniques, like Guy De Maupassant. Now they show, not tell, like Ernest Hemingway. And stories are now a lot longer. He gave the example of the (older) classic story, Fritz Leiber's "Coming Attraction," which is 3850 words. "I can't tell a joke in 3850 words," he lamented.

We now get more great stories each year than in the Golden Age, but it's also easier to write in a slow and leisurely pace. Nielsen Hayden noted that Roger Zelazny's *Nine Princes in Amber* has a very fast-moving opener. Swanwick quoted, "He was walking on the beach. A shot rang out." (I have no idea if this is the beginning of *Nine Princes in Amber*.) A mediocre writer, Swanwick said, will describe everything on the walk. Nielsen Hayden said, "There is a kind of Clarion story feel" which is like this, and observed that Raymond Chandler reads just like Roger Zelazny.

Swanwick talked about today's hack writers. "I have a problem with hack writers," he said. "With the exception of Terry Bisson, they're ashamed of what they're doing." He gave the contrasting example of Murray Leinster. Leinster dropped out of grammar school. In 1910 he wrote an article on flying a

glider and sold it. "I earned $5 without picking up a shovel," Leinster later said, and decided that was a good way to earn a living. But he admired Joyce and the other "literary" authors. He did not think he was up to their level, but he did not have a problem with this.

Looking at "reverse" influences, Ernest Hemingway was strongly influenced by pulp. The panelists said of current authors, David Foster Wallace and Paul Auster are "busy internalizing science fiction." And the mass media are making science fiction much more "mainstream." When *Bladerunner* came out, people had problems interpreting it, but now movies are more demanding and people can cope with it.

Fred Lerner asked if the invention of the movie has had the same result on writers as the photograph did on art. Do they need to concentrate more on the internal? Nielsen Hayden did not see that as happening, though he did say that the mainstream turned around after the 1970s.

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After the Dinosaurs: Pleistocene Megafauna
Sunday, 12N
Priscilla Olson

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"Everyone knows about the dinosaurs, but the Pleistocene Era produced a number of mammals that were as strange and fascinating as the dinosaurs. This talk describes them."

This talk was about a die-off 13,000 to 7,000 years ago. (Just to clarify, the Pleistocene comes after the Pliocene, which is the period Julian May wrote about.) At this time the largest fauna included things like the giant ground sloth, and while even today there are still anecdotal sightings of giant ground sloths, we mostly know these Edentata through their descendents: tree sloths, armadillos, and anteaters. There were also glyptodonts, similar to turtle in having a hard shell, but not ancestors of them: glyptodonts and turtles are an example of convergent evolution.

Extinction is when mortality is greater than recruitment (through birth or migration). The causes of extinction include climate, diseases, predation, and desiccation. Olson mentioned that even some animals which are alive today are basically extinct--cheetahs, for example, have a very reduced gene pool because about 2000 years ago, cheetahs were down to a total population of 2000. Were they not maintained through breeding programs, this restricted gene pool would result in their extinction.

The bottom line of the talk seemed to be that one knows exactly what caused the extinctions. Two books mentioned were *Evolution in the Fourth Dimension* and *The Evolution of the Mammals* by L. B. Halstead (aimed at a somewhat younger audience).

This talk was disappointing--it was a lot of charts and statistics, but hardly any discussion of the megafauna itself, and hardly any illustrations. (Think of a dinosaur talk without pictures of dinosaurs.)

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The American Civil War: Reality and Counterfactuals
Sunday, 2PM
Michael F. Flynn, Teresa Nielsen Hayden, Peter Weston, Ben Yalow

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"The American Civil War is a topic of much discussion and the basis of many alternate histories. Why is this such a popular topic? Why is it such a popular basis for counterfactuals?"

Someone observed that there were no Southerners on the panel.

The notion here was to place each panelist in a situation as one of the generals and ask what he or she might have done differently to change the outcome of the war. Yalow was McClellan in the fall of 1861, Nielsen Hayden was Joe Johnston in the spring of 1864, and Weston was Albert Sidney Johnston in the fall of 1861. (The panel never really got to the last one.)

Yalow said that for McClellan in the fall of 1861, the Peninsula Campaign was the right move. Defense wins every time because rifles outrange artillery at this time. To attack you must cross an open field under rifle fire, and the bayonet is turning into something you open a can with. The defenders can retreat faster than you can advance, so you have to make them stay there. On the other hand, the Union Navy has superiority. So Yalow/McClellan would start up the peninsula, wait for Lee to entrench, and then send the Navy up the river--Lee has to keep retreating to Richmond, and can be surrounded.

(Later there was a further clarification of firing rates, somewhat disputing the claims of Yalow regarding the defenders' superiority. The attacker marched across the field, and the first volley from the defenders did kill some of them, but a lot missed. Then the attackers could fire at the defenders from close range and hit everyone before the defenders could reload.)

Nielsen Hayden suggested that the South could declare the capital as being somewhere else, and that would change everything. With Richmond and Washington the capitals, though, everyone was pinned in a very small area. Johnston, she said, made some great retreats ("some of the best retreats in the history of warfare"). The best thing would have been if the Union had won at Bull Run, because Lee took tremendous casualties after he took over from Johnston. "Lee had a great sense of ground and a great sense of geography; he was an almost compulsively aggressive commander; he had an almost preternatural ability to read his opponents." But if McClellan hadn't panicked so easily, he would have been successful over Lee.

Turning more specifically to Joe Johnston, Nielsen Hayden said that the spring of 1864 found him between Sherman at Vicksburg, and Atlanta. She had no amazingly different strategy, saying, "I'd have been proud to have done as well as Joe Johnston did." Yalow observed that Sherman wasn't necessarily going for Atlanta; at every fork, whichever road at a choice Johnston defended, Sherman would just take the other road.

Someone saw Johnston as a sort of proto-fan (he got into a flame war with John Bell Hood). One distinguishing thing about Johnston was that he did not give orders, he gave a set of procedures.

Something at this point occurred to me--are unconventional tactics allowed? And almost immediately John Macdonald suggested that he would have blown all the bridges and dams, sent freed salves as refugees to Sherman for him to feed and care for, have women and children armed to force create casualties in his troops that he would have to care for, etc.--basically fight a guerilla war. Whether this tactic was allowed in this "game" was not clear, since there is a real question of whether the participant is allowed to do something that would not have occurred to the general, or that he would have ruled out as "dishonorable." (On the other hand, people see Sherman's campaign as the beginning of "Total War" and living off the land.)

Weston claimed, "Johnston, if he had been a more aggressive commander, could have stopped Sherman" by getting behind him and cutting his lines, etc., even just using standard 19th century tactics. Someone else thought that Union cavalry could have kept Johnston off Sherman's back.

Yalow noted, "We had never seen a country the size of the South conquered." European wars were fought over places like Belgium, which is the size of northern Virginia.

Someone said that Washington's strategy in the Revolutionary War was to protect his army, so why wouldn't this work in the Civil War? Because the Confederate government didn't see it that way. Nielsen Hayden said, "The war was [to be] won or lost in the West," but the Confederate government only saw the "Old South."

The question arose, "Why is the Civil War so fascinating?" Nielsen Hayden replied, "It's so fascinating because time travelers have tampered with it."

In a somewhat different approach to strategy, Weston said that the South could have won the Civil War by declaring their independence but never firing a shot.

Yalow noted that Clausewitz was not translated from German into English until after the Civil War. Weston said that Grant and Lee may not have read the book, but they were naturals. The general that won any arrangement was almost invariably the general who took the initiative. Yalow said that one of their disadvantages was that they hadn't invented idea of the general staff yet. Nielsen Hayden observed that Grant and Sherman were both learners, and Grant was a really good writer. He could write his orders very fast and you could always tell exactly what he meant. He wouldn't say "insofar as practical" or "attack those guns" (unspecified). Weston agreed, but said that when Grant got to Washington he got too enmeshed in politics and advice; he should have relieved Mead.

Nielsen Hayden said, "Everybody came to grief in the Wilderness"--a thicket of charcoal burners with primary, secondary, and tertiary growth. Weston thought that Grant should have come down the Shenandoah, and Yalow agreed, saying, "The Wilderness is always the wrong move if you're trying to keep anybody alive on your side." Again, you want to be on tactical defense, not strategic offense.

Nielsen Hayden recommended the book *Double Grapeshot at Ten Paces*.

Summary

I have been going to Boskone since 1969, and have missed only two in that time. But it is started to stagnate a bit, and the distance we need to go is becoming a problem. (Okay, the storm did not help. But even in good weather and perfect traffic, it is a five-hour drive.) In addition, the hotel and location are less than ideal--there is no way to get a reasonable meal without driving somewhere, and when the weather is bad, this is a real problem. (The hotel only does a buffet at breakfast when we are there, and the lunch and dinner food is reportedly mediocre.) The hotel was under repair this year, and to get from one part of our floor to another you had to go down to the lobby.

Will we return next year? I don't know yet. It is still a good convention relative to other local choices, but it no longer seems fresh and exciting. (I suspect it is also suffering by contrast with the excellent Aussiecon Three Worldcon.) We enjoy getting together with the people at Boskone, though, and that may be what draws us back.