Boskone 40
A convention report by Evelyn C. Leeper
Copyright 2003 by Evelyn C. Leeper

Table of Contents:

Boskone 40 was held February 14-16 in Boston, Massachusetts. Yes, it was back in Boston after being in Framingham for the last ten years, and in Springfield for five years before that. Attendance was about 1250. In some ways this was better than Framingham, and in some ways this was worse.

Had we not been retired, for example, we probably would not have been able to go at all. From where we live in New Jersey, Boston is (I estimate) a seven-hour drive if conditions are good. So we could not drive up after work Friday, but would have to take a day off, and we would have to leave early on Sunday to get home at a reasonable time. Because we are retired, we can drive up Thursday to my family's house in western Massachusetts, proceed to Boston early Friday, then return to my parents' Sunday night and back home Monday or later.

But the problem is that conditions are rarely good. In 1996, for example, it was a nine-hour drive to Framingham because of snow. This year . . . well, as I am writing this, I am still in western Massachusetts, watching a predicted two feet of snow fall, and having already postponed driving back until Wednesday.

On the way up, we stopped at a couple of bookstores in Westchester County in New York state before getting to Massachusetts, and a couple more in western Massachusetts, so as usual, the car was full of books before we even got to Boskone. We finally gave in and bought another (cheap) copy of Richard Condon's "Manchurian Candidate" to replace the one we have that we have been unable to find for two years. And I was sure that we saw a copy of Mahar's "Influence of Sea Power

on History" that explained to me why I have been unable to find our first copy for years--I had been looking for a blue Dover book but now thought that our copy was actually a large coffee table book with a nautical painting on the cover. However, the book we had that I was thinking of was *not* Mahar, so we are back where we started. Win some, lose some.

On the way up, we also listened to the audiobook of Bernard Cornwell's "Excalibur". Into my .sig file is going the quote, "The presence of tricks does not prove the absence of magic."

At Framingham, we would park outside, and had to drive places for breakfast and dinner. (There was a hotel restaurant, but it was over-priced and usually over- crowded.) In Boston, we got to park inside, never needed to drive anywhere (or even go outside), but had to pay $32 a day for parking! The hotel convention room rate was pretty good for Boston ($129/night plus taxes), but still higher than Framingham.

It took some time to get used to the new hotel but registration was fast, and the maps reasonably clear. One advantage is that the rooms have distinctive names, all with different first letters, rather than being Hampden, Hampshire, Hampton, etc. (I was surprised they did go whole hog in some of these places and have the Henry I room, the Henry II room, the Richard I room, the Richard III room, etc.)

Going into Registration, we saw Bob Devney kneeling as people came in. A closer examination showed that he was putting materials in a brief case rather than begging for Hugo votes. :-)

Programming

Since people are always discussing how to size panel rooms, and since one suggestion is always to have people count how many attendees various items get, I am providing a rough estimate for most of what I attended. It is hard to be precise--people arrive late or leave early, and it is also hard to count exactly from the front row.

Overthrowing the Bourgeois Hegemony of Panel Discussions
Friday 6:00pm Clarendon
Priscilla Olson, Patrick Nielsen Hayden

Description: "In which other ways of putting together convention programs are discussed, and the difficulties encountered therein examined...."

Estimated attendance: 25-30 people

The title came from something Nielsen Hayden had said, although he did not remember saying it. Olson said she spent a lot of time "practicing [pronouncing 'hegemony'] in front of a mirror."

Olson said that one of the most important things is that "panelists should be passionate"." All too often conventions have a list of people whom they think have to be on panels, and end up with panels such as "Panelists Whose Names Begin with 'B'".

One thing tried for the first time this year were "one-sies"--one- person items, often scheduled for thirty minutes rather than an hour. (Interestingly, most of the ones we went to lasted a full hour anyway; Boskone wisely left the rooms free for the second half of the hour.) Readings have often been this length, but Aussiecon Three was the only other convention that did this for regular items. Olson said they were likely to remain, because one- person items are easier to schedule--and to re-schedule if necessary. One downside was that there was no program grid because there were too

many items to fit on one. (This is also a function of a slightly larger convention.)

Other changes included moving all food and beverage out of the Green Room and combining it into the Con Suite. Boskone paid a $4000 corkage fee to have the Con Suite conveniently located to programming and dealers room, rather than having it several floors up. The Con Suite also had the clock; the Green Room did not. Then again, since hardly anyone hung around in the Green Room, it was not quite as necessary.

The Con Suite was very large, with lots of tables, a wide assortment of hot and cold beverages (non-alcoholic), and food ranging from chips to vegetables to cheese.

Nielsen Hayden said that a lot of these reflected a change form the "old NESFA--stuck-up snobbish bibliophiles" to the "new NESFA--so friendly you want to slap them." He also thought that perhaps this panel should have been at the end, but I suspect that the Gripe Session serves that purpose.

Someone asked, "What program item are you most worried about?" As I expected, the response was that concerns centered around the people involved rather than the panel. (Some people are better on panels, but some can be difficult.)

As for other ideas for program items beside standard panels, Nielsen Hayden said that dialogues between interesting people with differing views, who are still polite and respectful towards each other, can be very engaging. He gave as a example a dialogue between Samuel R. Delany and Robert Silverberg; I have been to good ones between Mike Resnick and Barry N. Malzberg, and the Joe Haldeman- Robert Silverberg one at Chicon 2000 was enormously popular.

When asked by an audience member, "Don't dialogues limit audience participation?" Patrick Nielsen Hayden observed, "This one didn't."

Other possibilities are demonstrations, workshops, and discussion groups.

One reason for all this is that panels have a certain homogeneity, as do other items. For this reason, the Guest-of-Honor interview is becoming an interesting alternative to the Guest-of-Honor speech.

For panels, one can narrow the focus. For example, do "Civil War Alternate Histories" instead of just "Alternate Histories". (One might claim by this point that even that has been over-done.) Nielsen Hayden said that dialogues should probably have more general topics than overly specified ones. (Offhand, he thought that Michael Swanwick and Jo Walton could have a good dialogue.)

From the audience, Janice Gelb said that one should not make panel titles questions because they are not open-ended enough. As Nielsen Hayden responded, "'What's new with Lord Dunsany?' 'Still dead.'" Teresa Nielsen Hayden said that one needs to write the precis of a panel way ahead of time, and panelists should be encouraged to discuss it to the extent that they agree on *what* they are going to be talking about, but they should *not* discuss it so much that they have the panel ahead of time. Gelb said that she had seen too many occasions when the panelists have a great discussion in the bar the night before the panel, but the panel itself was flat.

The necessity of educating panelists and moderators of their duties was mentioned (as always). Handouts are often good. (I think Mark Leeper was one of the first panelists to do hand-outs with any regularity.) Olson liked the idea of the joint hand-out done by Daniel Kimmel for "The One Foot SF and Horror Film Reference Bookshelf," incorporating all the panelists' lists. (I discovered that Kimmel did this was at Mark's suggestion.)

It was agreed that imitation if the sincerest form of flattery, and conventions should go ahead and steal ideas from other conventions.

Teresa Nielsen Hayden's idea of programming is that "you're giving people things to talk about in the bar and the Con Suite." She also warned against letting a particular subgroup take over a particular panel year after year, to which Olson added that one should not sublet programming out in general.

Room size matters (hence the attendance counts).

Teresa Nielsen Hayden reiterated the catch-phrase "Better programming and less of it." This led to a discussion of "bottleneck" or "hourglass" items, by which I take to mean items intended to draw the majority of the convention and against which there is little counter- programming, and no major items. (The Guest-of-Honor Speech is often such an item.)

Alternate MediaWorld
Friday 7:00pm Hampton
Michael A. Burstein, MaryAnn Johanson (m), Mark R. Leeper, Timothy E. Liebe, Shane Tourtellotte

Description: "Suppose STAR TREK and STAR WARS had never existed. Would Westerns still rule the tube? Ralph Bakshi be credited with the definitive LORD OF THE RINGS flick? William Shatner's literary career be tragically nonexistent? And would beanies be mandatory at this trufen- only com, if it were held at all?"

Estimated attendance: 15-20 people

Johanson began by saying, "If 'Star Trek' didn't exist, someone would have invented it." Burstein added that if "Star Trek" had not existed, "Star Wars" still would have, but without "Star Wars", there would not have been any "Star Trek" movies. Leeper disagreed, saying that the kids working with computers would have done enough to bring about "Star Trek" movies. To which Burstein responded, "Mark, you ignorant slut!" (And Leeper replied, "How did you know?")

Liebe described "Star Wars" as "Flash Gordon done right."

Burstein made the point that "Star Trek" grew fandom (especially among women), while Johanson thinks it was just the use of the various technologies in movies in general that did it. And Liebe reminded us that "Star Trek" was a borderline failure when it first ran.

Kimmel suggested that if there had been no "Star Wars", then Spielberg would have had his successes of "Jaws" and "Close Encounters of the Third Kind", but after "1941" flopped, there would have been no George Lucas to give him another chance by financing "Raiders of the Lost Ark", and hence no "Jurassic Park" (and certainly no "Schindler's List").

Someone noted that before "Star Trek", the successful science fiction series were anthologies: "The Twilight Zone", "The Outer Limits", "Science Fiction Theater", . . . This in part explains why "Star Trek" was such a phenomenon; as Johanson observed, "Characters are the key." Someone else thought that without "Star Trek" we would have ended up with a similar show based on Westerns and the idea of a voyage, but produced by Irwin Allen. Burstein asked if people could imagine "Irwin Allen as a Gene Roddenberry," but Leeper said that even then people did not have much respect for Irwin Allen.

Someone mentioned Gerry Anderson's "Thunderbirds" as a substitute, but someone else said one could not have an emotional attachment or involvements with puppets. To which Burstein replied that without "Star Trek" and "Star Wars", "science fiction fandom would have gone after the Muppets."

Audience members also suggested other existing fandoms which might have been larger: "The Man from U.N.C.L.E", "Dark Shadows", and "Starsky and Hutch". Interestingly, these were all shows that drew women into fandom. Burstein thought this was because they were somewhat like soap operas (particularly "Dark Shadows", and said, "[Comic books] are my soap operas."

Kimmel said that one change brought about by "Star Trek" was how ratings were calculated, since "the suits" realized that they were not counting television sets in college dorms at all. He felt that without "Star Trek", there would have been no revival of science fiction brought about by "Star Trek: The Next Generation", but Burstein said that J. Michael Straczynkski had said that it worked *against* "Babylon 5"--he was told that "only 'Star Trek' works" by the networks.

Several people thought that the availability of computer technology and CGI would have driven more science fiction pictures in any case. Certainly after "Terminator 2", a lot of scripts were written which revolved around the morphing technology. However, Liebe said that "The Abyss" and "Willow" had morphing before "Terminator 2", but did not make as big a splash, and Tourtellotte said that the first computer effects were not in "Tron", but in "Star Trek 2: The Wrath of Khan", only people did recognize them as such. (I wonder if he meant "Star Trek III: The Search for Spock".)

Liebe said that one major effect of "Star Trek" and "Star Wars" was not that we watch them, but that non-fans do. Johanson said that the divide was the moon landing (and the space program leading up to it), and that it was what generated the interest in the general public in science fiction.

As for the write-in campaigns, Nomi Burstein claimed that after "Star Trek" they happened a lot. The second write-in campaign, for example, was for "The Waltons" after its first season. Johanson said that it was not necessarily anything about "Star Trek", but something that "came out of the activism of the era." Nowadays write-in campaigns have little effect, especially email campaigns, because (as Burstein said), "The more frictionless the communication becomes, the more the signal is overcome by the noise."

Burstein noted that while everyone lauds "Star Trek" for having a black woman in the crew, Nichelle Nichols was ready to quit because she saw her character as just a glorified telephone operator, but was told that she had to stay on "Star Trek" because even as a telephone operator, she was showing Middle America that a black woman could be an officer on a starship. And who told her this? Martin Luther King, Jr. And in addition, at least three of the black astronauts have said that "Star Trek" and the presence of a black crew officer on its crew were what inspired or encouraged them to become astronauts. (The moon landing astronauts, on the other hand, said that they were inspired by Robert A. Heinlein.)

One audience member thought that "Star Trek" was popular because during the time of Cold War, it showed an optimistic future when most science fiction was pessimistic ("Fail-Safe", "Dr. Strangelove", and all the scary science fiction of the 1950s).

Someone pointed out that "Star Trek" was not the first multi-cultural television show. Others existed before (heck, even "I Love Lucy" was multicultural!), but "Star Trek" was the first to have non-American multi-culturalism. Uhura was African, not African-American, Scott was Scottish, and Chekov (second and third seasons) was Russian. Someone noted that "Mission: Impossible" was fannish, but did not have enough characterization to be really popular.

Currently the most popular show is also very fannish: "CSI" (and "CSI: Miami"). There was some debate about whether there was characterization on these shows. (I see more on "CSI" than on "CSI: Miami", but that may be a function of the former having been on longer.)

Deconstructing the Food Pill
Friday 8:00pm Fairfax
Bob Devney, Matthew Jarpe, Mark L. Olson (m), Joe Siclari

Description: "You didn't drive your flying car to Boskone 40 -- don't you feel cheated? Now we're going to tell you why you're not going to get your meatloaf and mashed potatoes in one convenient capsule (and the apple pie's right out too.) The panel talks about the skiffy archetype of instant food in a pill, and what all those writers of yesteryear DIDN'T explore. After all, if we are already a society of low-fat energy bars, why can't we produce the ultimate (but nutritional) 'diet pill?'"

Estimated attendance: 25-30 people

Siclari introduced himself by saying, "I'm Joe Siclari and I like to eat," which pretty well summed up why food pills are not universally appealing. Jarpe has a Ph.D. in biochemistry; Olson has Ph.D. in theoretical chemistry.

But if there *were* a food pill, what would it imply?

Well, the first question was about fiber, but Siclari says that the biggest pill *is* a fiber pill.

Devney said that he calculated that a 2000-calorie diet would require a 16- ounce, or one-pound, pill (calculated at 4 cal/gram for protein or carbohydrates, 9 calories/gram for fat). Jarpe said that one could get by on 1000 calories for an inactive adult, with 250 grams glucose, vitamins, and some fat. He later suggested 500 calories in glucose and 500 calories in fat as a possible ratio.

In any case, this would be one large pill, but could be done as several smaller pills. (Olson asked how many people in the audience were taking more than one pill already--more than half, I think-- and pointed out that taking several pills a day is not a major issue. The issue is more that people like to eat, and someone said that what today's society wants is an "anti-food pill." There were some comments on Olestra, the fat that does not get absorbed by the body, and I will repeat what I said there: we have eaten a fair amount of it and have had any adverse reactions, and in fact there is no experimental basis for the warning that the FDA insisted be put on the packages of products using Olestra.

But when did a food pill become a futuristic trope? Siclari said it was in the 1930s during the Depression when people wanted cheap, easy food. Olson said that the 1930s had a streamlined future in general, and that labor-saving was more important than taste. Now we are more interested in taste or other aspects. (Devney suggested "free-range ice cream" as representative of this trend.)

In support of the observation that convenience is not the be-all and end-all, Devney said that he had heard that "MREs were considered worse than smart bombs in Afghanistan." (MREs are "Meals-Ready-to-Eat".)

Olson thought that the pill was the result of "naive linear extrapolation", and I would suggest that the microwave and various instant foods have given people the convenience without a total loss of taste. A similar naive linear extrapolation is what makes us think that computers will keep expanding and that we will direct-connect to them. ("Spam delivered directly to your brain!") Olson said this does not happen because in these extrapolations, "we tend to assume that inventions will be used as intended," and then discover that they do not. People suggested virtual reality and Picturephone as other technologies that "have food- pilled." And someone else has said that artificial intelligence is another technology suffering from naive extrapolation.

I asked if pills would fill your stomach so that you did not fill hungry. The answer was that there would probably be an appetite suppressant in the pill, and one would drink water or something with

it (since it would decrease one's need for water, and in fact would mean drinking more, since that would be the only source of water). Someone also said that there would probably be something to bulk it out and slow down its passage through the body to give the body a chance to absorb it.

Even though a pill would presumably not have a taste, people discussed the five basic tastes: sweet, salty, sour, bitter, and imami. ("Astringent" was suggested a possible sixth, but this does not sound right.) Jarpe said that these tastes were actually important to primitive man trying to find food that was safe to eat. Sweet made sure they got enough calories, sour told them whether the fruit was ripe (I guess lemons never are), bitter told them if alkaloids were present, salty got them enough salt, and imami ("mouth feel") got them enough fat. (This is not iron-clad, and may be pure speculation, but what the heck.)

Someone asked, "If we feed everyone by air-dropping pills, what do you do with the populations?" And where do the calories initially come from? Do you grow them or what?

As for the latter, methane has four times the energy content of fat, according to Jarpe, and Olson said that 500 grams of gasoline, converted into something absorbable by humans, would be enough for a person for a day. (This inspired Devney to re-iterate that there is more to eating than nutrition.)

An audience member said that all this talk about food pills made a lot more sense in the context of space opera and space travel, where size and weight are at a premium. Someone asked exactly where one saw this supposedly widespread trope, and the only examples people could come up with were the 1930 film "Just Imagine" and the television show "The Jetsons". Edie Stern suggested that the food pill was adopted as another way of setting a science fictional scene, saying, "The food pill is another way to have the door iris open."

Apparently on Gemini 3, John Young smuggled a corned beef sandwich on board and Gus Grissom ate it. (At the time there was a lot of concern about particles floating around the capsule, but after several space flights it was realized this was not as much a problem as feared.)

Olson said that it would probably be more likely that we would use yeast to feed people, probably processed into imitations of other food. "Kind of like roast naugahyde," responded Devney. We also have seitan, quorn, and tofu now in this position.

Devney asked the audience what the last country in the world where the food pill would catch on would be and then answered his own question along with a chorus of voices: "France!" Olson seemed to demur when he pointed out, "They like Jerry Lewis."

Jarpe said one thing worth speculating on is what would happen to advertising, noting that there is "more advertising when you can't tell the difference." Devney suggested there would be catchy names like "Pizzaburst." "PowerPill" was another idea. (And yes, at some point someone cried out, "Soylent Green is people!")

Someone mentioned the story titled "F---" (a.k.a. "The Foodlegger) by Richard Matheson (available in BORN OF MAN AND WOMAN and THIRD FROM THE SUN) in which eating is obscene but elimination is considered okay in public.

Someone claimed that the military is actually working on a "combat feeding system"--a patch!

Jarpe closed by saying that the most efficient methods of feeding would involve modifying us to photosynthesize or use uranium as our energy source. (However, I think one reason that plants can get all their energy by photosynthesis is that--barring triffids and such--they are relatively inactive. Eating is the price we pay for mobility.)

And speaking of eating....

This was the only party I attended and it was pretty darn good. (This constitutes my notion of a party review.)

Art Show Reception
Friday 10:30pm

I went to this and it seemed as though there was less art than last year, but that may have been the lay-out changes. Mark Olson also said that there had been a shift recently to more three-dimensional art and hence fewer paintings and drawings, which may be what I was seeing.

Strange Connections and Secret Histories
Saturday 10:00am Hampton
Debra Doyle, Daniel Hatch, Alex Irvine, Beth Meacham (m)

Descriptions: "There are more and more books where the author, like Tim Powers, re-examines the past and reveals the 'real' secrets hidden there. Supernatural conspiracies may explain what we might have always though of as dull historical trivia, and underlying connections between the most disparate events are elucidated with great verve. What the hell is going on here? Are secret histories gaining on alternate ones? Why are they so addictively enjoyable? How might the fantastic reinterpretation of history practiced by such authors relate to current events? And, in a world where Mae West slept with Ho Chi Minh, what even stranger connections might make intriguing reading?"

Estimated attendance: 35-40 people

Doyle said her connection with this panel is that she is writing Knights Templar stories. Irvine's first book, "A Scattering of Jades" is about the existence of a hidden Aztec cult in Jacksonian America.

Meacham, as an editor, said, "I love it when a writer says those few more words to make it [history] all make sense." Doyle agreed, saying the basic appeal seemed to be to give "underlying meaning to seemingly random events." Irvine also concurred, saying that secret histories were "not so much as an exploratory process as a consoling one." Hatch expressed it as, "We're looking for higher degrees of unity."

Irvine said that secret histories are different than alternate histories in that you are writing within a closed form and cannot contravene real history. "Alternate history," he said, "lets you reset your rules." (And I agree.) Later, Meacham said that she would not include UFO stories in with secret histories, because another basic characteristic of secret histories is that it does not look for external influences. Later someone asked about the Shaver mysteries as well.

Doyle felt there was also the "appeal of esoteric knowledge in general"--the idea that the reader will know something that other people do not. ("Nyah, nyah, nyah.")

Meacham said of the attempt to provide underlying meaning that humans tend to impose patterns in general. (This is certainly true of physical patterns-- consider constellations, or even the Martian

"canals.")

Someone cited the amazing Civil War coincidence of Wilmer McLean, whose house was on the battlefield of the first battle (Bull Run/Manassas) and was so worried that he moved as far away as he could get--to Appomattox Court House, where his was the house used for Lee's surrender. (Teresa Nielsen Hayden once posted a list of these sorts of things, couched as if a copy-editor were checking a text. The first read, "There appear to be some inadvertent duplications -- probably word processor errors. Wilmer McLean appears both as a farmer living in the vicinity of Bull Run, on whose land the first battle of the war takes place, and again as a farmer living in Appomattox Court House, several hundred miles away, which is where the war ends. The author should decide which character is the real Wilmer McLean, and find a different name for the other one. ... Also: Two of the highest-ranking Confederate generals are both named Johnston, and both the President of the Confederacy and a high-ranking Union officer are named Jefferson Davis. This duplication of names is unnecessarily confusing.")

Meacham asked more specifically, "What sparks these novels?" Irvine said his was inspired by a visit to Mammoth Cave, where they have found mummified corpses, some buried in pre-Aztec fashion. Doyle said it was often random items an author brought together, which she likened to exercises in drama class where you are given three or four objects and told to create a skit around them.

(Someone in the audience pointed out that the layout of the cave in the old computer game "Adventure" was based on the actual layout of part of Mammoth Cave.)

Meacham said that Tim Powers usually starts by "[finding] some bizarrely true thing" and then tries to come up with some conceivable explanation for it. For example, in "On Stranger Tides" he started with the facts that Bluebeard used to put lighted fuses in his beard. However, someone felt that what Tim Powers was writing was not secret history, but fantasy, because magic works. The question of whether historical fantasies in general were secret histories was raised but not answered. Doyle said that Delia Sherman's "The Porcelain Dove or Constancy's Reward" was, and Dorothy Dunnett's historical novels are almost secret history.

Hatch talked about the synchronicity aspect of strange things and Doyle saw this as part of the notion of "six degrees of separation." An audience member suggested that the tabloids and the Web are fertile sources for secret histories.

Someone asked if the "Illuminatus" books of Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson were the first of the secret histories. (Note that Robert *Anton* Wilson is a different author than Robert *Charles* Wilson, author of "The Chronoliths" and alternate history "Darwinia".) Irvine said that Thomas Pynchon's "V" and "The Crying of Lot 49" preceded them, and later Doyle noted that what was arguably the most famous (and infamous) secret history, "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion", predated all of them. Later on, Irvine observed that in the realm of fiction- qua-fiction, "the spiritual ancestor of all this stuff is Kafka's novel "The Trial", in which everything is inexplicable, and that there is a whole "literature of the paranoid" derived or descended from that. (Which would of course, be another great panel--hint, hint.)

Asked for recommendations, the panel named John Crowley's "Aegypt" and other works (Meacham), Philip K. Dick's "Valis" (Irvine), Umberto Eco's "Foucault's Pendulum" (Irvine), Michael Flynn's "In the Country of the Blind" (audience member), Mary Gentle's "Book of ASH: A Secret History" (audience member), Robert A. Heinlein's "The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag" (audience member), Tim Powers's works (Meacham), Thomas Pynchon's "Gravity's Rainbow" and other works (Irvine), Theodore Roszak's "Flicker" (audience member), and Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson's "Illuminatus" trilogy (Meacham) and Neal Stephenson's "Cryptonomicon" (Doyle). Of these, the Roszak is probably the least familiar, so I will give that one

a plug as well, particularly for fans of silent films. Roszak is best known for his Tiptree- Award-winning "The Memoirs of Elizabeth Frankenstein", sort of a secret history of the Frankenstein story. The Gentle is a strange mixture of secret *and* alternate history, and won the Sidewise Award for Alternate History in 2002.

Meacham felt that given the current situation, there was a resurgence of paranoid fiction coming. Irvine talked about Pynchon, saying that in Pynchon's works "paranoia is the sole creative act." The problem, as with "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion", is when people confuse fiction with fact, but as Meacham noted, "There will always be the gullible." There is always a blurring of truth and fiction in some people's minds. Irvine said that after Goethe published "The Sorrows of Young Werther" there was a rash of suicides. On a less elevated level, someone named "reality shows" and professional wrestling as examples of this blurring. And a classic example seems to be Sherlock Holmes, who *still* receives letters addressed to him at 221B Baker Street. (I do not count the public pose of Sherlockians that Holmes is real and Doyle was just his literary agent, because I believe that they do not believe this is really true; it is more in the category of Civil War re-creators.)

Meacham suggested that the Harry Potter stories could be considered a secret history. The panel closed with the comment that "Forrest Gump" was a secret history. I guess that would make "Zelig" one as well, and earlier. But that is basically saying that any historical fiction with new characters is secret history, including "Gone with the Wind" and "Ivanhoe". This way lies madness.

Is This the Golden Age of Fantasy Movies?
Saturday 11:00am Hampton
Bob Devney, MaryAnn Johanson, Mark R. Leeper, Laurie Mann (m)

Description: "The 'Golden Age of Science Fiction' may be '12,' but the golden age of the fantasy movies is NOW! Starting with The Princess Bride and continuing with such great films as Crouching Tiger, the Lord of the Rings films, the Harry Potter films, and so on, this has been a great time for fantasy film. While science fiction movies seem to be languishing, fantasy movies are vibrant. The panel looks at this trend."

Estimated attendance: 35 people

Mann provided her list of the great fantasy films of the last twenty years:

- "Dragonslayer" (1981)
- "Ladyhawke" (1985)
- "The Princess Bride" (1987)
- "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade" (1989)
- "Edward Scissorhands" (1990)
- "The Fisher King" (1990)
- "Nightmare Before Christmas" (1993)
- "City of Lost Children" (1995)
- "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" (TV)" (1997)
- "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" (2000)
- "Shrek" (2001)
- "Spirited Away" (2001)
- "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone" (2001)
- "The Fellowship of the Ring"" (2001)
- "Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets" (2002)
- "The Two Towers" (2002)
- "The Return of the King" (in production)

- "Coraline" (in production)
- "Pirates of the Caribbean" (in production)
- "Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban" (in production)

Leeper said that it was too soon to declare this as a Golden Age because "a Golden Age is something you feel nostalgic for." As he put it, "Call no age Golden until it is gone." Devney responded to this by saying, "We're in the prediction business," but Mann quickly added, "We're often wrong."

Johanson said that there were indeed a lot of fantasy films these days, but it is more "a lot of crap" than a Golden Age. Mann felt that fantasy was on the rise, while "science fiction films of the last few years have hit the toilet," but Devney said that he, at least, liked "Waterworld".

Devney said that earlier fantasy films were based on literature (e.g., "The Wizard of Oz" and "The Princess Bride"), and only recently have we started seeing original fantasies on the screen, starting with "Ladyhawke" and "Edward Scissorhands".

Leeper said that what spurred a lot of fantasy films was a film like "Star Wars" that showed that you could actually put on the screen what you visualized in your mind. He did not completely agree that science fiction films were in the toilet, but that was because, as he said, "I would disqualify a film as science fiction when the two hundredth bullet is shot." He also said that "The Princess Bride" is not primarily a fantasy--it is a comedy. Someone in the audience suggested that we need a "hard fantasy" category. Mann and Devney both agreed that "Mary Poppins" might be another merely nominal fantasy. Johanson added that, "'Willy Wonka' was one of the films that warped my brain as a kid."

For that matter, some non-science-fiction seems like science fiction. "Big machines causing horrible death" is a very science-fictional idea, said Leeper, and one of the main aspects of "Titanic."

Devney felt that the best fantasies represented the "artist's personal view" rather than a collaborative vision, and cited "Being John Malkovich" and the works of Hayao Miyazaki. "We look for that in a literary work," he said, and should do so in films as well.

Leeper conceded that this is a potential Golden Age for animated film, as many technologies and filmmakers were creating a synergy in that area. Mann saw "The Secret of NIMH" (1983) as the start of this; I would consider "Watership Down" (1978) instead.

Johanson said that another spur to fantasy films is that we are more open to exploring other cultures than we used to be, and cited "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon", "Lilo & Stitch", and "Spirited Away" as examples. Devney said that along these lines, "Bullet-Proof Monk" was scheduled for release April 4. (This will probably violate Leeper's Rule, which Leeper says applies to fantasy films as well.) Johanson said that there was also "Iron Monkey" and (much earlier) "Big Trouble in Little China" (1986).

With a lot of these films, such as "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" and "Lilo & Stitch", Johanson said, "Geek has gone mainstream." And Devney said that eventually Spielberg will be considered as one of the two or three most influential filmmakers of the past twenty years.

Devney said that for those wondering what the future holds in store for fantasy (and science fiction) films, he had a list of upcoming films: "Daredevil", "Till Human Voices Wake Us", "Spider", "Dreamcatcher", "The Core", "Paycheck", "Cowboy Bebop", "Bullet-Proof Monk", "X-Men 2", "The Matrix Reloaded" and "The Matrix Revolution", "Bruce Almighty", "Terminator 3", and, of course, "The Return of the King". Leeper responded to this list by adding "The Hulk" and saying, "Major filmmakers used to want to make a science fiction film; now they want to make a comic book."

Devney mentioned Tim Burton as "a man with a vision," and Leeper observed that his best films were made with writer Caroline Thompson (who also wrote the 1994 "Black Beauty" and "Chicken Run"--the latter yet another popular animated fantasy of recent years). Leeper said that Terry Gilliam is another "man with a vision" whose films are always interesting. He said he had recently seen the documentary "Lost in La Mancha", about Gilliam's failed attempt to make a Don Quixote film, and Gilliam's upbeat responses in the question-and-answer afterward led him to believe that "when life hands Gilliam lemons, he makes lemonade."

Other films Devney recommended included "Happy Accidents" and "Afterlife". The latter reminded me that there seems to be a major cycle of Japanese horror films going on now, which unfortunately seems to be visible in this country only on the Sundance Channel or in the form of American remakes (e.g., "Ringu" as "The Ring"). (However, at least one, "Audition" ["Odishon"], is available on DVD.) (And having written that, I just discovered that when "The Ring" was released on DVD on March 4, so was "Ringu", so there's hope yet.)

Other recent mainstream fantasy films that no one mentioned were "Groundhog Day" and "Field of Dreams". From the audience, Constance Hirsch suggested Peter Jackson's "Heavenly Creatures", which reminded Devney of Jackson's "mockumentary", "Forgotten Silver", which is a fantasy of sorts. Mann recommended Jackson's "The Frighteners". (Jackson has also had a couple of small fantasy films recently. :-)) An audience member recommended anything by Jan Swankmajer, and Mark added the works of the Brothers Quay.

Someone in the audience mentioned a film that (surprisingly) was not mentioned earlier: "Iron Giant". And there is also "Amelie", "Adaptation", "Human Nature", "Being Human", and of course a slew of fantasy on television.

Adults Invade Kidlit?
Saturday 11:00am Gardner
Jeffrey A. Carver, Bruce Coville (m), Laura Anne Gilman, Jennifer Hall, Tamora Pierce

Description: "More adults seem to be reading children's literature (and indeed, more 'adult' writers are breaking into the field). What could there be in that appeals to adults? Is the popularity of this subgenre, coupled with the immense influx of adult readers, changing how writers of fiction for younger fans are approaching their material?"

Sorry, I cannot summarize this, since it was opposite "Is This the Golden Age of Fantasy Movies?", but would love to read someone else's report, particularly on what in children's (or young adult) literature adult readers find appealing. (For me, it is that these feature a return to the traditional values of plain old-fashioned story-telling rather than a lot of flashy technique, and also that they tend to be more tightly written and do not ramble on for hundreds or thousands of pages--J. K. Rowling excepted, apparently.)

Did Tolkien Harm Fantasy?
Saturday 12:00 n Independence W
David Brin, Greer Gilman (m), Darrell Schweitzer, Jo Walton

Description: "JRR Tolkien is the major figure of 20th Century fantasy, and The Lord of the Rings is one of the world's greatest fantasy works. But, did Tolkien (and the success of The Lord of the Rings) harm fantasy -- spawning hordes of imitators and forcing subsequent fantasy into a particular mold, while suppressing other types?"

Estimated attendance: 75 people

Walton began by saying (facetiously), "Tolkien started fantasy but what has he done for it since?" She added on a more serious note that Tolkien was really good at writing about the details of a journey--walking, eating, etc. He could write paragraphs describing the hobbits preparing a meal, and make them interesting. Unfortunately, while the quest structure was copied by other authors, it was copied badly, and these other authors did not have the talent to make the details interesting.

Gilman described Tolkien as "part transcendent mythmaker, part bombast, part 'Boys' Own' writing," and as a "Gryphon in Galoshes, [where] everyone else is just the galoshes."

Schweitzer arrived a little late, saying, "This place make the Escher Hilton look positively straightforward." (The "Escher Hilton" is the Ryebrook Hilton, site of Lunacon, but I disagree with his description of the Boston Sheraton--I think it was just that this was everyone's first year there.)

Gilman brought him up to speed by saying that we were talking about the quest motif, and added that one other thing that everyone copied from Tolkien was the depiction of mountains on end-paper maps as a row of point things. This was purely accidental--Tolkien just could not draw mountains well. Schweitzer said these maps reminded him of late Roman maps, which were accurate in terms of the distances between places, and to the which roads connected them, but not to the shape of land masses.

I found myself wondering if the problem was that people were taking the wrong things from Tolkien, or whether trying to take anything and "clone" it is inherently doomed. Isn't the whole problem that people keep trying to copy him? Yes, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, but it may not produce great art.

Schweitzer said the most damage was done not by those failing to reproduce Tolkien, but by those who dismiss him with contempt and write "McTrilogies". He said that when Lester Del Rey saw "The Sword of Shannara" he said that it would change fantasy forever. And as Schweitzer said, "The problem was that he was right." "People want to isolate the active ingredient" of Tolkien and crank out more books from it, he complained. He felt that it was groups such as the "Scribblies" who revived fantasy after the deluge of Tolkien copies. (The "Scribblies" are officially the Interstate Writers' Workshop, including Steven Brust, Emma Bull, Kara Dalkey, Pamela Dean, and Patricia Wrede. Later Steven Brust and Mary Gentle were singled out as fantasists who were doing original work.)

Brin (who arrived even later) said he had had an essay on Tolkien on salon.com (http://archive .salon.con/ent/feature/2002/12/17/tolkien_brin). Tolkien was a Romantic, Brin said, writing in opposition to the future and "progress," and believing in the idea of a previous Edenic stage of mankind. He said that this position was critical to fantasy. For example, he supports Anne McCaffrey's claim that she is writing science fiction rather than fantasy, not because of the "scientific" explanations of the dragons, but because "it lauds progress, rather than feudalism and hierarchical social orders." Fantasy, he claimed, is about a past golden age rather than a future one, and then gave a long speech about the evils of feudalism and similar systems, and how our ancestors had left Europe to get away from the Cossacks and others who would come through to take their "women and wheat." Brin came down very strongly in favor of science fiction and against fantasy, but then said that Tolkien was okay because "he had a reason"--his reaction to the mechanized horrors of World War I. As soon as Sarumen turns evil, Brin pointed out, "he chops down all the trees and turns urban." But for whatever reason, Brin was not willing to completely condemn fantasy, and said to us, "You, as children of the Enlightenment, can slum in fantasy."

Walton responded to this long speech by saying, "That's a very American view," and pointing out that most if not all of the rip-offs were written by Americans who did not understand feudalism or

hierarchical social order. (It did seem to me that the Cossacks and others that our ancestors fled were not so much representative of feudalism as of unrestrained hooliganism. The same problems arose in Nazi Germany, which I do not think could be called a feudal state. But maybe I am confused.) Addressing Brin's rant against feudalism as a system that keeps everyone locked into their place, Gilman said that Tolkien's people have both a place *and* social mobility. In part to attempt to head off more rants on feudalism, Schweitzer suggested that it might not be necessary for fantasy to believe in the divine right of kings at all.

There was some mention of other "threads" of fantasy besides the Tolkienesque, such as those deriving from H. P. Lovecraft and Lord Dunsany, Arthurian legends, Homeric legends and heroic fantasy (e.g., Conan), or even folklore. Brin said that he defines fantasy as one of several vehicles for Romanticism. (That's a definition?)

Someone quoted Anthony Lane's review of an Ayn Rand book: "An ubermensch adrift in an unterbook." (I'm not sure how this fit in, but it was too good a quote not to include.)

Walton pointed out that fantasies are symbolic and should not be read as realistic novels. As such, the hierarchical order, and social structure does not necessarily reflect something considered desirable in the real world. Also, their basis in fairy tales implies a lot more psychological underpinnings than one might normally see.

Schweitzer said that the Ballantine Adult Fantasy novels were what made fantasy a genre, and editor Lin Carter said that the sales of the various volumes were proportional to how similar they were to Tolkien. So when Lester Del Rey took over, he made things resemble Tolkien as much as possible.

Brin closed by observing that DC Comics was doing a graphic novel of his story "Thor Meets Captain America" and noting that "the Nazis and the Confederacy were the most Romantic of the modern states." (Brin is clearly not someone to put on a panel praising Romanticism.)

The One Foot SF and Horror Film Reference Bookshelf
Saturday 1:00pm Hampton
F. Brett Cox, MaryAnn Johanson, Daniel Kimmel (m), Mark R. Leeper, Michael Marano

Description: "There are many film reference books, some general, some aimed specifically at genre films. The panel examines film reference books and tries to decide the truly essential ones are for a fan of SF and horror films. After all, you can't get ALL your info off the Internet or in the gutter....."

Estimated attendance: 15 people

[At the end of this report is an appendix containing the lists provided by all the panelists.]

Kimmel began by asking each panelist to name the one general-purpose book they would choose as the most useful. Three chose movie guides. Marano said for him it was Maltin's annual "Movie and Video Guide", while Johanson named "Video Hound's Golden Movie Retriever", and Cox preferred Nick Martin and Marsha Porter's "Video and DVD Annual". Kimmel and Leeper chose works other than movie guides: Kimmel selected Halliwell's "Who's Who in the Movies", while Leeper chose Ephraim Katz's "Film Encyclopedia".

Asked to name their favorite book within the science fiction and fantasy genre, panelists diverged even more. Cox said he tends to go on-line to http://www.fortunecity.com. (Everyone agreed that for general information, the best site was the Internet Movie Database at http://www.imdb.com.) Kimmel liked Phil Hardy's "Encyclopedia of Science Fiction Movies". (Hardy also has "The

Encyclopedia of Horror Movies" and "The Encyclopedia of Western Movies". These are also known as "The Overlook Film Encyclopedia of Science Fiction", "The Overlook Film Encyclopedia of Horror", and "The Overlook Film Encyclopedia of Westerns".) Johanson said that John Clute and Peter Nicholl's "Encyclopedia of Science Fiction" covered films reasonably well. Marano liked John Stanley's "Creature Features" guides and the two volumes of Michael Weldon's "Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film" because, as he said, "they are so intensely personal."

Leeper said, "You always remember your first time," and named Carlos Clarens's "An Illustrated History of the Horror Film." In 1970 or so, he had heard of this book, and asked the bookstore at the University of Massachusetts if they would order it for him. They said they did not like to order individual books, but if he could guarantee that they could sell five copies, they would order it. By asking everyone he knew eventually Mark found four other people, so the bookstore ordered five copies plus a couple of extra. In the remaining couple of years, they regularly sold out, restocked, sold out again, and so on. Of course, this was about the only book on the topic at the time.

Narrowing down to books with a fair amount about specific films, Kimmel recommended Kenneth Von Gunden and Stuart H. Stock's "Twenty All-Time Great Science Fiction Films", even though it is somewhat outdated now. Marano liked John Clute and Peter Nicholl's "Encyclopedia of Science Fiction".

Johanson goes to the http://www.stomptokyo.com site, and said they have a book coming out soon. Leeper said the best of this category would be Bill Warren's "Keep Watching the Skies" about *all* the science fiction films of the 1950s, now available as a single huge volume. For this period, Kimmel also recommended Peter Biskind's "Seeing Is Believing", a book covering more than just the science fiction films of that era, but dealing primarily with them from a sociological point of view. The site http://www.hometheaterinfo.com was also mentioned.

Asked about which magazines are worth reading, the consensus was that while retrospective magazines such as "Filmfax" have some interest, the ones about current films are all basically press releases, and frequently you will read exactly the same words in different magazines.

[Again, the complete list is at the end of this report.]

Great Civil War Alternate Histories
Saturday 2:00pm Gardner
Peter J. Heck, Evelyn C. Leeper, Joe Siclari (m), Peter Weston

Description: "The American Civil War has spawned more alternate histories than any other period in history (except, maybe, World War II). The panel talks about alternate histories based on Civil War turning points. Are these turning point takeoffs realistic? And are there other big turning points in the Civil War that haven't yet been used, that could be the subject of a great alternate history story in the future?"

Estimated attendance: 15 people

(As usual, my notes for this are skimpy--it's hard to be on a panel and take notes at the same time.)

Weston (a Brit) suggested that the American Civil War was popular as a source of alternate histories because it was English-speaking, modern, and full of technology in a way that earlier wars were not. Also, there are so many points in the war that seem to be critical. It is even popular in Britain, with groups of Civil War re-enactors even there. (He said he had recently seen a re- enactment of the Battle of Shiloh at Malvern.)

Heck felt that in addition, the Civil War was a defining moment for the United States, and still meaningful. During World War I, and even World War II, Southerners in the Army in Europe who were called "Yanks" took great offense, and Heck said that even recently a friend who was called in to help with some computer problems in an office in the South did not get two sentences out of her mouth before the other person asked, "Are you a Yankee?" I said that what I found interesting, and mostly meaningful somehow, was that many of us who are interested in the Civil War were the children or grandchildren of immigrants and had no ancestors or relatives in the Civil War at all.

Weston mentioned that historians had been doing alternate histories for years, only they called them "counterfactuals." I said that these tended to be more about battle movements, etc., and less about the changes on society that these wrought, and Heck said that while "scholars get the thing right, authors make it entertaining." He also noted that authors have more speculation than historians, and gave Harry Turtledove as an example. (Heck is Turtledove's editor.) As Turtledove and others have said, alternate history is just a variation on Theodore Sturgeon's admonishment to science fiction authors to "ask the next question."

I made the observation that a lot of historians seem to end with the divergence, while authors merely begin with that.

One point of divergence suggested and not previously used (so far as we could recall) was what would have happened if Lincoln had been able to persuade Lee to fight for the Union.. Someone's mention of the book "Seventeen Molecules That Changed the World" led me to think (after the end of the panel, unfortunately) that an alternate history based on the premise that there was better medical and surgical care during the war would be interesting. (Most of the casualties for both sides were due to disease rather than battles, so even something which improved only that could have been critical.)

Origami
Saturday 2:00pm
Mark R. Leeper

Estimated attendance: 20 people

(I did attend this, but Mark was good enough to write it up.)

I have been teaching origami at Boskone for ten years or so. I look at it as a way to pass on the origami I invent. I never really learned how to diagram to the degree I would need to make my figures available to others.

I was on a panel just before the demo, so I had to run down to the Art Show room and had no setup time. I sat at the table, put out some figures I had folded in advance, and began to fold. The time came to start and not one person showed up. I thought that seemed strange because my demos always got a fair number of people previously. Laurie Mann was standing just three or four yards away and here I was being shut out. I was sitting there folding morosely and at about five minutes after one person sat down. Then within one minute there were sixteen or so people around the table. It occurred to me that since I had had a hard time finding the tables, other people probably did too. I assume that was why everyone was late and arrived about the same time. I taught my Viking Longship for the second time and my Starship Enterprise for the first time. Both of the folds I invented since December. I am sort of unusual in origami circles. Lots of people teach but few invent all the figures they teach. It is like an entertainer who sings popular songs versus an entertainer who writes and sings his own material. Maybe four more people came up as we went along and about as many left early. Unlike previous years, most of the faces were unfamiliar except for the always-

welcome Janet Yelle and another friend, Bruce Burdick.

Slipstreamy Stuff
Saturday 4:00pm Constitution B
p Ellen Asher, F. Brett Cox, Moshe Feder (m), Gregory Feeley, Alex Irvine

Description: "What lurks on the borders between mainstream and genre fiction? What makes works cross over from one to another?"

Estimated attendance: 20 people

(This was a bit smaller and started later because it had to be moved from its original room when that one started leaking water through the lights in the ceiling!)

The term "slipstream" was discussed. I believe the panelists said that it was coined by Bruce Sterling for his now-famous article in Volume 1, Number 5 of "SF Eye" (and that's my recollection as well). Sterling wrote that slipstream was fiction that "sets its face against consensus reality," but not focusing on extrapolation or a "sense of wonder." Cox said there was no real definition for "slipstream" (much as is true for "science fiction" in general), but that Archie Bunker's description of a hermaphrodite seemed apropos: "Too much of both and not enough of neither."

In his article in "The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction," Clute implies that the implication of being pulled along by an air stream was not merely accidental, but intentional.

Someone said that Carter Scholz had said that the best speculative fiction is not what shows up on Hugo nomination lists, but mainstream literature that is using science fiction.

People used to talk about Lucius Shepard, Rudy Rucker, and others as "breaking out" of our genre, but J. G. Ballard and Carol Emshwiller were doing it back in the mid-1960s. Cox later added Jonathan Lethem and Karen Joy Fowler as "insiders going out" of science fiction. Feeley pointed out that part of this is hiding their backgrounds; Fowler's short story collection did not list the previous appearances if they were in science fiction magazines. Other authors who have broken out include Kurt Vonnegut and Philip K. Dick.

(This "breaking out" has given rise to some resentment among science fiction writers and fans, who see it as treasonous, as "trying to pass.")

The distinction was made that "category" is a marketing concept, but "genre" is a philosophical attitude. Feeley said that his definition of science fiction, horror, and fantasy would include rather than exclude slipstream. He also said, "Slipstream is a publishing category; it is not an essential category." He also added, "Slipstream is science fiction published by Knopf."

Asher commented, "I'm getting increasingly impatient with all these arguments. . . . Slipstream is another term for cross-over." She also disputed the claim that Feeley made earlier that content does define science fiction. I would claim that content can make something science fiction, but that science fiction does require something off a specific list of tropes. E.g., immortality granted by alien medicine makes something science fiction, but "Flowers for Algernon" is science fiction even without rockets, aliens, or any other familiar science fiction icons. In this regard, science fiction has changed over the years. In 1944, Arthur C. Clarke could write, "Willy Ley's long-awaited book need not be recommended to all who are interested in astronautics--and presumably all science fiction fans are included in that category." At that time, science fiction was much more likely to be linked to rockets. Sixty years later, no such implicit linkage between science fiction and spacecraft exists.

Irvine said that slipstream is "literary writers appropriating the tools of science fiction and using them better than science fiction writers," and that this is part of what causes the angst about it. According to Irvine, the course of American literature in the 20th century differs from its course everywhere else. In the United States, Realism and Naturalism were important trends, in large part due to the pronouncements of people such as John Crowe Ransom, Lionel Trilling, and Edmund Wilson. Cox mentioned the key books in the New Criticism, "Understanding Fiction" and "Understanding Poetry" by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren. According to Feeley, Henry James and others said that "literature was properly and exclusively the movement of consciousness in the real world," although they did "grandfather in" such writers as Shakespeare and Kafka who digressed from this rule. In doing so, they "imposed deformed readings on 19th century literature," according to one of the panelists (Feeley?).

Of course, in the 1960s or so the magical realists destroyed all these notions.

Irvine said that regardless of all the theory, publishers will publish what sells, though Asher said it would be more accurate to say that publishers will publish what they know how to market.

Returning to Feeley's notion that content does not define science fiction, Irvine said that the setting of Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale" does not make it science fiction. (Here I have to disagree.) Science fiction, he said, is a set of assumptions about the world--for example, that the interaction of people with technology is the most important aspect of the world.

Feeley pointed out that Maureen McHugh wrote a diptych consisting of "Mission Child" and "Necropolis". The first was marketing as science fiction, the second as mainstream. (I can add the example of Octavia Butler's "Parable of the Sower" and "Parable of the Talents", which were similarly marketed--and the cataloguing information sent to libraries reflected this. The result was that my library had both, but one was in the fiction section and one in the science fiction section until I pointed this out to them, noting people would probably expect to find the two of them together.)

Editor Gordon Van Gelder gets around the categorization problem in "The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction" by saying that he publishes "stories of interest to science fiction readers."

Asked for some classic slipstream titles, Cox listed Don DeLillo's "White Noise", Thomas Pynchon's "Gravity's Rainbow", and Salman Rushdie's "Midnight's Children". Someone said that Neal Stephenson's "Cryptonomicon" was the first slipstream work nominated for a Hugo, but I suspect Vercors's "Sylva" would also qualify, as might Daniel Keyes's "Flowers for Algernon". Recent major slipstream works include William Gibson's "Pattern Recognition" and Umberto Eco's "Baudolino". As another example of the popularity of slipstream, the current issue of "Conjunctions" (number 39) is dedicated to the "New Wave Fabulists."

(The Sterling article mentioned also includes a long list of "canonical" slipstream works.)

(Unfortunately, the panel was still running at 4:58 PM when I left. Whatever happened to those 5-minute warning signs?!)

What's Wrong with the Skeptical Movement These Days?
Saturday 4:00pm Dalton
Robert J. Sawyer

This was another panel I would have loved to attend, but I have not yet figured out how to clone myself.

Moby Dick: The Great American SF Novel?
Saturday 5:00pm Dalton
Debra Doyle

Estimated attendance: 15-20 people

This was one of those "onsies," which were scheduled for a half-hour but ran somewhat over that.

Why discuss "Moby Dick" at a science fiction convention? Well, it a favorite of many fans, but also it is readable as science fiction. And there are echoes of "Moby Dick" in Samuel R. Delany's "Nova" as well as Philip Jose Farmer's "The Wind Whales of Ishmael".

Doyle started by quoting a professor as saying, "'Moby Dick' has probably driven more men mad than any other novel." It is so towering a work than all the rest of Herman Melville's writings as sometimes referred to collectively as the "extra-cetalogical works," and not read except by students. Well, the latter may be a bit of an exaggeration. I have read "Typee", "Redburn", "White Jacket", and "Billy Budd", as well as some of Melville's shorter fiction. Then again, I may not be a representative sample.

Doyle claimed that "Moby Dick" is not a typical 19th mainstream novel; it is more like Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" or Laurence Sterne's "Tristram Shandy". She also said that it was not your standard novel of bourgeois realism, but a "romance"--an "adventure remote in time or place." (Does that make it slipstream?) Other of Melville's works are also of science fictional interest. "Typee", for example, is a classic "first-contact" story. (I observed this years ago to a science fiction group in Turku, Finland, of all places.)

However, even if it is not a novel of "bourgeois realism," it does pay close attention to the realism of the technical aspects, in a way that science fiction traditionally has as well. Doyle started to say that it does not deal with "interior states of mind," but then paused and asked (of no one in particular) "as opposed to exterior states of mind?" She said it did display "richness of invention, as in lots of really neat stuff." It also was a "presentation to the reader of an entire unfamiliar world." The result is a lot of what might be called "expository lumps," and Doyle said she suspected that science fiction readers enjoy these parts more than other readers.

And it is full of science fiction tropes: an ethnically diverse crew, an alien sidekick who is both comic and wise as well as being a subversion of the conventional, a "girl-free" universe, and, of course, the basic nature of the whale.

Heck, I'm convinced.

Upcoming Worldcons
Saturday 5:00pm Clarendon
Vince Docherty, Deb Geisler, Peter Robert Jarvis

Description: "Find out what you need to know about the 2003 (Toronto), 2004 (Boston) and 2005 (Glasgow) World Science Fiction conventions. (Especially!) if you're new to the game, feel free to ask questions and learn more about how many fans spend their summer vacations....."

Estimated attendance: (I did not count, but the room was pretty full)

ConJose presented $10,000 in pass-on funds to Torcon 3, and would have handed a similar amount to Noreascon 4 if there had been enough checks in the checkbook the treasurer had brought. Really.

From the nature of some of the questions, Torcon 3 needs to provide a lot of hand-holding to some American fans. Here are my few comments that might be forgotten otherwise:

The ATMs at banks in Canada do not appear to charge a fee. However, your United States bank may charge a special, higher fee for "foreign" use--and Canada counts. Check how much this in and use the cheapest card.

Credit cards give you the best conversion rate, but many cards charge you an extra 1%-2% "foreign exchange fee" over the original 1% over prime rate. Again, check your cards' fine print. I suspect credit union cards are the most likely to not have this.

Save your receipts over C$50 for GST refunds, and think about pooling purchases with friends at bookstores to achieve the minimum. New regulations require that you get your receipts validated on leaving, whether by car or by plane, in order to claim your refund. (It used to be that air travelers did not need to do this.)

Legal Seafoods

Dinner, as usual, was with Kate Pott, Dan Kimmel and his wife, a friend of Mark's from high school, her husband, and their daughter. We talked a *lot* about movies.

On Cloning
Saturday 9:00pm Dalton
Matthew Jarpe

Estimated attendance: (I forgot to count)

This began with an explanation of cloning as done with adult cells. In "normal" reproduction, two haploid cells join to form an embryo. This cell is totipotent--that is, it can become any sort of tissue. After it has divided several times, the cells are pluripotent--each can become many different kinds of tissue, but not all. (By the way, "epigenetics" is the study of why cells differ.) Eventually, after many divisions, the cells become terminally differentiated (somatic cells) and can produce only one type of cell. Cloning involves making a terminally differentiated into a totipotent cell.

But what makes cells become various types of tissue? Chemicals called morphogens cause this--variations in concentration determine how cells become different types, so a cell's distance from the source of the morphogen makes a big difference.

One method of cloning might appear to be to replace the haploid egg nucleus with a diploid regular cell nucleus. But you could not do this with a somatic cell until 1996, when the method for making a somatic cell totipotent again was developed.

But just because you can clone animals does not necessarily mean the results will be viable. A day or two before the panel, Dolly the Sheep was euthanized. Jarpe said that Dolly's mother was six years old when Dolly was cloned, and Dolly was six years old when euthanized, but he thought this was just a coincidence. However, in animal cloning, only one attempt in two or three hundred succeeds in even producing a viable embryo. The animals cloned so far are sheep, goats, cows, cats, mice, pigs,

and chickens. The choices have been based on which animals have the most controllable reproductive cycles rather than any great love for these animals over others.

Drug companies would love to be able to use cloning to grow specific proteins, but the fact that the success rates are so low indicates that we do not really know what is going on--we have a stochastic (random) process rather than a predictable one.

Also, we still do not understand the dangers involved. In humans, almost any chromosomal abnormality results in mental retardation, but (as Jarpe noted) it is hard to detect mental retardation in sheep.

In general, before medical or surgical techniques are tried on humans, they must be tried on monkeys first. But monkeys have long life-spans, so cloning monkeys and then observing them through their life-spans would mean putting off human reproductive cloning for at least another generation or two.

In spite of this, and in spite of the push against such research, Jarpe said, "Our President is going to ban all human cloning. That's a science fiction moment right there."

What to Nominate for the Hugos
Saturday 10:00pm Hampton
Claire Anderson, Vince Docherty, Jim Mann, Mark L. Olson (m), Peter Weston

Description: "Wow -- does your vote ever count! What's hot and what's not, among all the books, stories, movies, and art our genres produced in 2002? Take in the pitch, pitch your own favorites, and catch some others. You're about to make some really good writers, artists, and fans ecstatic!"

Estimated attendance: 30 people

I go to this panel every year, and every year it has the same problem. The panel begins with a hand-out of the NESFA web page of books, etc., recommended by various members (http://www.nesfa.org/hugos02.html), and then mostly those same members in effect read their recommendations off the page. I often feel that I could just go to the web page and get 90% of the panel, and I tend not to take notes on that part, so this write-up is just what is not on the web page.

Olson said that Michael Swanwick's "Bones of the Earth" was more upbeat than most Swanwick.

Docherty, whose recommendations were not on the web page, recommended Christopher Priest's "The Separation", Jasper Fforde's "The Eyre Affair" and "Lost in a Good Book", and China Mieville's "The Scar". (The first I enjoyed quite a bit, but is not available in a Unite States edition yet, and there are no plans for one as far as I know. The first Fforde is available in the United States and I highly recommend it; I am looking forward to the second.)

Weston recommended "The Scar", Elizabeth Moon's "The Speed of Dark", and Robert Metzger's "Picoverse", and said Kim Stanley Robinson's "The Years of Rice and Salt" reminded him of some of James Michener's books.

The most interesting discussion was in the newly expanded Dramatic Presentation categories (which possibly should have had a panel of their own). A whole raft of things were mentioned for "Short Form", including "Cracking Contraptions" (a new "Wallace & Gromit" cartoon), the IMAX movie "Space Station", "Scrat's Missing Adventure" (available on the "Ice Age" DVD), the MTV "Council of Elrond" satire (available as an Easter Egg on the "Fellowship of the Ring" extended DVD), and "Mike's New Car" (available on the "Monsters, Inc." DVD). Games such as "Halo" and "The Elder

Scrolls III: Morrowind" would possibly also be eligible, though that is more iffy, particularly in figuring out which length they are.

And in spite of Olson's insistence, I do not believe that the "Fellowship of the Ring" extended DVD is actually eligible as a single "Long Form" work first released in 2002, nor do I believe that the director's cut of the film is eligible as a "new" work, though I would agree that the individual documentaries or even some collections of them are eligible as "Short Forms."

Talking about Movies: Which DVD Commentaries Are Worth Listening To
Sunday 11:00am Clarendon
Claire Anderson, Bob Devney, Evelyn C. Leeper, Laurie Mann (m)

Description: "Director M. Night Shyamalan of SIGNS won't do one because 'it shouldn't be a gynecological exam.' But for THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING, Peter Jackson provides 14 hours of commentaries alone. And on SPIDER-MAN, you even hear from the arachnid wrangler. Which of today's tracks are tedious, which tasty....and which good enough to select for the Best Dramatic Presentation (short form) Hugo award?"

Estimated attendance: 10-15 people

I was the one who came up with this topic, based on conversations with fans who were aware of commentary tracks but unsure of whether they were worth listening to. I had written an article (http://www.geoc ities.com/evelynleeper/2002/VOID0830.htm#dvd) with my recommendations for the best commentaries, but it certainly seemed like a good topic for a panel as well.

The panelists began by naming which DVDs had the best commentary tracks or other extras. Devney recommended "Dark City" (with a commentary track by Roger Ebert) and "Frailty", and later added "The Big Zero".

I said that the two best I had seen were "Apollo 13" (with a great commentary by astronaut Jim Lovell and his wife, a good commentary track by director Ron Howard, an Easter Egg of the complete soundtrack, and additional material as well) and "Thirteen Days" (with a great historical commentary by a variety of people including Sergei Krushchev, Nikita Krushchev's son and a professor at Brown University; a good commentary by the cast and crew; and additional material as well).

Anderson said she was a librarian, but added, "I might as well work at Blockbusters." She liked the material on "The Big Sleep" comparing the two versions, but said, "Mundanes just want to see the movie." Among the questions she is asked is, "Do you check to see if I've watched everything?"

Mann said, "Priscilla Olson has now accused me of being a media fan." She named "The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring", with four commentary tracks and six hours of additional material. Of the four tracks, she said that the director's commentary was the best. She also liked the commentary track for "Ghostbusters".

Mann also said that while her husband Jim always wanted to watch the DVD with no commentary before watching the commentaries, she preferred to go right to the commentaries (assuming, of course, she had already seen the movie). There are arguments on both sides--when there are multiple commentaries, one can easily over-dose on the movie, and skipping the "bare" version might help. (We tend to watch the commentaries a few weeks apart, particularly for a really long film such as "The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring".)

A commentary track that might appeal particularly to science fiction fans who like to know all the technical details would be the writer's commentary on "Gosford Park", in which the writer says things like, "Well, actually, the third footman wouldn't be walking up these stairs unless he were accompanying one of his employers, but we needed to get him into the hallway," or, "My great-aunt always used to judge a household by whether their marmalade was homemade or store-bought."

In addition to standard commentary tracks, some are subscripture/text versions. For "The Abyss" has a text commentary for the special effects, and "Shrek" has subtitles for the commentary in multiple languages (as well as audio commentary in multiple languages). One recommendation I made was to turn on the standard subtitles or closed captions while the commentary was playing so that you did not find yourself straining to hear the dialogue under the commentary.

There was also a discussion of Easter Eggs. These are special features that are not accessible through the normal menus, or not documented. An example of the first type is on the extended version of "The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring": if you put in disc 2, go to the chapter selection scene, go down to the last chapter, and then go down again, you highlight a previously invisible ring. Pressing "enter" then gets you the MTV satire of the Council of Elrond scene. An example of the second is on "John Carpenter's The Thing": one of the audio options of the documentary is actually the full soundtrack of the film. On "Apollo 13" you get this by just letting the main menu screen play. On "Topsy-Turvy" you get complete songs on some of the auxiliary menu screens the same way. (Most Easter Eggs are short interview clips or trailers-- the ones I listed are among the best.)

Sometimes there are interesting "standard" options. "Monty Python & the Holy Grail" has the usual subtitle options (English, French, etc.), but also a set taken entirely from Shakespeare's "Henry IV, Part 1". "This Is Spinal Tap" has a commentary by the cast in the personae of their characters; in effect you get something almost like a sequel.

The Criterion series was singled out as having good commentary (often taken from their laserdisc series), as well as good supplementary material. (They are also usually a bit more expensive.) They did *not* do "Citizen Kane", though that is similar in having a great commentary by Roger Ebert, an okay one by Peter Bogdanovich, a two-hour documentary "The Battle over 'Citizen Kane'", and other material.

It turned out that we also needed to explain pan-and-scan (a.k.a. "full- screen") versus widescreen. Assuming you have a standard television, the screen on it is approximately 1.33 times as wide as it is high. But most movies made since the 1960s are 1.85 times as wide (or more--the most extreme I know of is "Ben Hur" at 2.76 times as wide). So the DVD maker has a choice. He can show you the entire picture, but there will be black bars at the top and the bottom of the screen. Or he can fill the screen, but then he has to cut off one or both sides of the picture--hence "pan-and-scan," where the camera pans from side to side to try to capture the main part of the action. For some movies this is okay, but for a film such as Richard Lester's "The Three Musketeers" it is a disaster, because in the sword fights you see only one person at a time, instead of the two people together on the screen.

Most DVDs are widescreen. Some provide both widescreen and pan-and-scan, either on two discs or on the two sides of one disc. (They usually call it "fullscreen" because that sounds so much better than "pan-and- scan," but I notice that the DVD of Miyazaki's "My Neighbor Totoro" is quite honest in calling it "pan-and-scan.") Both occasionally there are two separate releases, one widescreen and one pan-and- scan. So you have to be careful when you buy, particularly at places such as Wal-Mart ad Target, which tend to stock the pan-and-scan. If the package says, "This film has been modified to fit your screen," it is pan-and-scan. (Although the packaging for "Journey to the Center of the Earth" says that, as well as saying it's widescreen. It *is* widescreen--and beautifully restored--and I suspect the "modified" statement was inadvertently copied from some VHS packaging.)

My original article on DVD commentaries is at http://www.geoc

The Politics of Literary Acceptance
Sunday 12:00 n Gardner
Charles N. Brown, F. Brett Cox, Patrick Nielsen Hayden, Steven Sawicki (m), Darrell Schweitzer

Description: "A candid discussion of what, other than merit, makes a book famous or widely published. (Or critically accepted.)"

Estimated attendance: 30-35 people

Schweitzer began by saying that sometimes politics is the controlling factor. For example, Lord Dunsany is not well regarded in Irish literature because Dunsany was too British for the Irish and too Irish for the British. Hanns Heinz Ewers was out of favor when people thought he was a Nazi, but now people are saying that it is possible that he was not anti-Semitic enough for the Nazi Party, so maybe he is okay.

Schweitzer said also that sometimes an author is accepted or rejected based on connections. George Stirling was a poet known best of the mentor of Clark Ashton Smith, so his acceptance has varied with Smith's. And sometimes an author may be ahead of his or her time. The example he gave was Evangeline Walton, who was ahead of her time and had to wait for acceptance. And finally, if an author is part of a "movement," they are more likely to be accepted.

Nielsen Hayden responded that movements are "attempts to impose narratives on a bunch of unruly text." Literature does not "develop," he said--that is a false teleology. (This is the same view that was expressed by Greg Feeley last year on the panel on "Rediscovery: Olaf Stapledon and Other Classics in the Field"--also in response to a comment of Schweitzer's. I wonder if this wouldn't be an interesting topic for a panel in itself.)

Sawicki asked about whether editors had a better notion of acceptance, asking Nielsen Hayden. "Do you have a sense of what books will take off and which will just lie there?" "Yeah," Nielsen Hayden replied, "but I'm wrong all the time." He added that if there is not enough of a particular category (such as "military gothic romances") for the demand, more books will get defined into that category. (I see this with historical fantasies being defined as alternate histories when the publishers submit them for the Sidewise Award.) Later, he gave the example of Fritz Leiber's "Conjure Wife", which had at various times been marketed as a Gothic romance, a fantasy, an urban fantasy, a horror novel, and who knows what else. This led Brown to observe that if Lucius Shepard changed his name to something Hispanic and moved to Central America, he would be a big mainstream literary success.

Schweitzer pointed out that due to the vagaries of the book-selling business, you can have a book like "Urshurak" which is a best-seller and also a money-loser.

Cox tried to bring it back to an idea of "literary movements and the politics of acceptance," saying we wish we were in an ideal world where everything is judged on merit, but we live in a fallen world where everything is politics. William Gibson's "Neuromancer" won acceptance because of the politics and environment of the time--but it also was very good.

Schweitzer returned to the notion of being "carried along" on a more popular author's coattails, saying that Hippocampus was reprinting a series called "Lovecraft's Library" consisting of books that Lovecraft owned or mentioned. (This reminds me of the web pages listing the books that Helene

Hanff ordered from Marks & Co.)

Schweitzer also observed that acceptance can vary by location: Tolkien is high art here, but the establishment critics in England hate him (though he is respected by academe). Nielsen Hayden disagreed with this, saying that Tolkien was not as reviled as Schweitzer supposes. Cox said there was a different sort of attitude at times, and that "Harry Potter" was considered "insufficiently subversive" for some critics in the United Kingdom. In the United States, however, fundamentalist right-wingers hate it, which automatically makes it seem better to many people.

Nielsen Hayden said that the whole question of a canon was something that critic Terry Eagleton has discussed, saying that to a great extent it represented a "dumbing down [of] the curriculum" for the middle classes. Schweitzer noted that the canon changes with time, and that "there are ex- classics." As proof, he said just to look at the older Modern Library editions for what other books were issued in that series, many of which are almost totally unknown now.

Nielsen Hayden, in an interesting synchronicity with the "Slipstreamy Stuff" panel, said, "We exaggerate the extent to which 20th century literature is centered around Realism," and mentioned the books "Understanding Fiction" and "Understanding Poetry" as the reason for this. Cox agreed that there was a lot of literature that did not fit this model, saying, "Flannery O'Connor is deeply weird." To which Nielsen Hayden added, "If you like the Coen Brothers . . ."

Someone talked about people who are remembered for what Damon Knight did to them in his scathing reviews; A. E. Van Vogt and Jerry Sohl were mentioned in particular, although it was said that Van Vogt appeals to something deep in science fiction readers. Schweitzer said, "'Slan' is a book about adults written by a very bright child."

Addressing why Frederick Jameson embraced Philip K. Dick but not Theodore Sturgeon, Cox said it was because "Dick was a genius and Sturgeon wasn't." Also, Jameson wanted the "hardcore existential crises you got in Dick's work"; style was less important. (By the way, at ConFrancisco, Kim Stanley Robinson said that Jameson was the only critic worth reading on postmodernism.) I found myself wondering if critics felt a need to accept an author's entire body of work rather than a single book. (This relates back to the "Moby Dick" panel.) Brown later said that this seemed to be the case regarding Dick and one found critics (or academics) writing essays about such "lesser" works as "The Zap Gun".

Nielsen Hayden said that one bar to acceptance by mainstream critics was the lack of the necessary prerequisites. For example, he feels that Gene Wolfe has all the qualifications for acceptance, but that understanding and appreciating Wolfe required a previous knowledge of Jack Vance and other genre fantasists. Cox said that John Crowley was making the cut somehow. Someone else said that Wolfe is not really concerned with "breaking out" into mainstream acceptance, but others authors (such as Michael Bishop) are. (This seems again related to the "Slipstreamy Stuff" panel.)

Cox said that there is also generational acceptance, as opposed to critical or academic acceptance. (I think Robert A. Heinlein's "Stranger in a Strange Land" might qualify here.) Brown said that Sturgeon's writing was tied to the period it was written in and he [Brown] finds he cannot re-read most of it.

As for what brings about critical acceptance, Nielsen Hayden said, "High cultural opinion is pulled along by popular culture more than they want to admit." And it certainly seems to me as if the acceptance of Philip K. Dick came after Hollywood started making successful and popular movies of his works.

Of critical trends, Schweitzer said that "the plague of deconstructionism is all over." (It always seemed as though it was in a sense consuming itself, since its antipathy to a fixed reading could be

applied to its own writings. This is the same problem that the Vienna Circle had with its claim that the only meaningful philosophical statements were those that were either inherently true (by definition or syllogism), or were empirical and verifiable. Karl Popper pointed out that this claim was neither, so by the Circle's own rules, meaningless!) However, the deconstructionists did manage to get to H. P. Lovecraft with Donald R. Burleson's "Lovecraft: Disturbing the Universe".

However, Schweitzer felt that one of deconstructionism's problems was its incomprehensibility, saying that when the Mafia discovers deconstructionism, they will make you an offer you can't understand. Cox felt this was a bit disingenuous, asking whether literature was different than other studies in that its criticism needs to be more accessible. As he pointed out, no one complains too much if a critique of an economic system is difficult (or impossible) for a layperson to understand.

Schweitzer said that the ultimate example of incomprehensibility was Samuel R. Delany's paper at Readercon 2, "Semiotics and Deconstructionism". People still are not sure if he meant to be incomprehensible, or just misjudged his audience.

Savage Humanism
Sunday 12:00 n Hampton
Gregory Frost, James Patrick Kelly

Description: "Learn more about this subgenre (characterized by, among other things, 'an awareness of the history and evolution of SF that often reveals itself as allusion' and 'a hell of a lot of anger'). Two exemplars of Savage Humanism discuss the necessary and sufficient characteristics of it, and share examples of central texts."

Yet another panel that I could not get to that sounded interesting. Doesn't anyone else write up these things?

Autographing: David Brin
Sunday 1:00pm Independence Foyer
David Brin

Given the usual high level of organization, this was surprisingly disorganized. First, Brin arrived late. (Okay, the committee had no control over that.) But then he started signing, and would sign all the books each person had--and some of them had twenty or thirty! After about a half hour, when the long line barely moved, I went over to the NESFA window and asked if someone couldn't come over and impose a three-book limit, which Mike Benveniste (bless him!) immediately did. This helped enormously, even though Brin still wanted to have conversations with everyone in line as well. I think for the authors for whom a long autograph line is expected, an up-front three-book limit and a clarification of the difference between an autograph line and a kaffeeklatsch is necessary. :-)

The Worst Program Item Ever
Sunday 2:00pm Clarendon
Steve Miller, Priscilla Olson (m), Margaret Organ-Kean, Ben Yalow

Description: "How bad can bad be? The panel will try to SHOW you, using examples from far too many awful convention incidents. Have fun, add to the chaos (if you dare), and learn something about what convention programmers (and sometimes even program participants) have to deal with

during a convention....."

Estimated attendance: (unknown)

I went to this, but realized it was virtually identical to last year's "How Bad Can a Bad Panel Get?" and so left.

Hint: One way to have a bad panel is to repeat it year after year. The panelists were somewhat different, but the script seemed to be the same.

When Good Writers Go Bad
Sunday 3:00pm Gardner
Fred Lerner, Allen Steele

Description: "Late Herbert, Heinlein, and the later production of other writers (not including any of our current guests, of course) sucks (or, to put it perhaps a bit more politely, isn't really up to the standards they established early in their careers.) When did these icons of SF "jump the shark?" Who else? How (or perhaps, why?) What are the characteristics of this and other bad writing? Is every bad writer alike?"

Estimated attendance: 40 people

[I had to look up "jump the shark" to figure out what it meant. Maybe the program decsription writers should not be so quick to adopt the absolute latest slang.]

(Laura Anne Gilman and David G. Hartwell also were supposed to be on this panel, but left early because of the approaching storm. No disgrace should fall on them.)

The obvious answer is that good writers go bad when the editors stop editing them, but Steele said, "I'm not going to say anything [bad] about editors, especially with a recession going on."

Lerner said that what usually happens when a good writer goes bad is that he stops, except for Heinlein. Steele agreed that Heinlein definitely changed, and that he went through several different periods: his early period (during the Golden Age), his mid-period, and his decline. Steele felt that Heinlein's best was his mid-period, with "Farnham's Freehold" his only misstep, and with "Glory Road" as perhaps the best science fantasy ever written. Lerner said that "Time Enough for Love" has some of Heinlein's best writing, but that it is not Heinlein's best book. One problem towards the end was that Heinlein wanted to include all his fictional characters in one universe (a problem that I will note afflicted Isaac Asimov as well). Also, Lerner pointed out that Heinlein's late books were written by a childless man near the end of his life, and so his pre-occupation with producing children is understandable.

Steele said, "I am second to none in my admiration for Heinlein; I consider him to be one of my major influences." But, he continued, Heinlein's later works all start the same way (and here I am paraphrasing slightly what Steele said): "Hi, you have nice breasts." "Thanks, they're mine." "Oh, look, they're shooting at us. Let's get married and run away."

Some authors, Lerner noted, "immunize themselves from editing. (He suggested "When Good Writers Go Unedited" as an alternate title for the panel.) Steele noted that some really successful authors (e.g., Tom Clancy) have a "no-edit" clause in their contracts. (Apparently they forgot that they may have become successes because of the help of their editors.) On the other hand, some writers cherish their editors and will even leave one publisher for another if their editor changes over.

From the audience, Bob Devney observed, "A writer doesn't have to have a brain tumor to go bad. A writer doesn't have to get old to go bad. A writer just has to start repeating himself to go bad." (This led Steele to note that Sir Arthur C. Clarke has post-polio syndrome, which may have affected the quality of his later works. I asked how much of them were written by Clarke and how much by his co-author. Steele acknowledged that share-cropping is a major concern, but said that there is "a certain amount of rough justice" involved, in that an author who lets lesser co-authors do most of the writing ends up with their name on a lesser book. Lerner referred to this as "co-signing a bad book."

Another reason good authors may appear to go bad is that they may dredge up early, bad, unsold books to order to meet a publisher's demands or deadlines. Steele said this was the "deadline nightmare" that authors have, where they are reminded that they have a book due the next day that they had completely forgotten about (like the dream when you discover you are in school and have an exam that you had forgotten to study for).

As proof that age does not necessarily imply decline, Lerner said to compare Heinlein to Poul Anderson-- Anderson improved with age.

Laziness is a big factor. Steele said that there is "a temptation to do the same old thing over and over again if the same old thing is selling." This leads to series, or at least to very similar books. Steele said he had to fight against this. After his books in his "Near Space" series, his next two were not in the series, and not as financially successful, but he had to break out of the rut. Steele said he was doing a sequel ("Coyote Rising") to his current book, but swore, "I will not commit trilogy."

Frederik Pohl also knew when to end a series, as did Ursula K. LeGuin.

Lerner summed this up by saying, "One of the worst things that can happen to a writer is to write something so successful that they are tempted to keep repeating it." He compared Roger Zelazny to Samuel R. Delany. Zelazny wrote five good Amber books, but they were too successful and he got convinced to write more: "The readers wanted them; the publishers wanted them; I'm sure the IRS wanted them." Whereas Delany refused to keep writing books in his series. Lois McMaster Bujold, Terry Pratchett, and Harry Turtledove were named as authors who seem to be trapped in and by their successful series. Other authors who had or have managed to break loose are Bernard Cornwell, John D. MacDonald, and Patrick O'Brien. The classic example of the author trapped by his success is Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and his Sherlock Holmes series. (Of course, Doyle wrote other works. One of his last was "The Land of the Mist", an apologia for spiritualism. This highlights another way good writers can go bad.)

Even a successful series is not a guarantee, of course, and an audience member said that not only was Spider Robinson writing only Callahan stories, but that they were going downhill.

[Thanks to Thomas Yan for bringing me a glass of water. The rooms were *way* too hot!]

Miscellaneous

Having the Prudential Center attached was nice because of the weather, but not great. For breakfast, a lot of people liked Marchelino's, just outside the Sheraton, but we found it over-priced and not offering a lot of choice of standard food. One person claimed that ordering "a small cup of coffee" three times got him three different things, none of which were an ordinary small cup of coffee, and there was no "normal" toast. In addition, Sunday morning saw them short of staff and some food.

Unfortunately, move back to Boston made the convention cost a third more for me than it did in Framingham. (Obviously, for people who live near public transit or fly in, Boston is probably

cheaper.)

And for those who didn't read the entire report thoroughly, here's a summary of my panel suggestions: - Dialogue between Michael Swanwick and Jo Walton (suggested by Patrick Nielsen Hayden) - Franz Kafka and the Literature of the Paranoid - Is There a "Hard Fantasy" Siimilar to "Hard SF"? - Is This the Golden Age of Animated Fillm? - Do Movements Exist? Or Are We Just Atttempting to Impose Narratives on a Bunch of Unruly Text?

Best quote: As someone whose luggage had apparently been in her car for a while said, "There's nothing like a refrigerated tampon to wake you right up."

Appendix:

```
The One Foot SF and Horror Film Reference Bookshelf

(Boskone 40 - February 15, 2003)

Daniel M. Kimmel

General reference:
www.imdb.com

Leonard Maltin's "Movie & Video Guide"
Halliwell's "Who's Who in the Movies"

Directories:
"Creature Features" by John Stanley
"The Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film" by Michael Whedon
"The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction Movies" by Phil Hardy

Histories:
"An Illustrated History of Horror and Science Fiction Films" by Carlos
Clarens
"Science Fiction Studies in Film" by Frederik Pohl and Frederik Pohl
IV
"Future Tense: The Cinema of Science Fiction" by John Brosnan

Criticism/Analysis of Individual Films:
"Twenty All-Time Great Science Fictions Films" by Kenneth Von Gunden
and Stuart H. Stock
"Omni's Screen Flight/Screen Fantasies" edited by Danny Peary
"Cult Movies" (vols. 1-3) by Danny Peary
"Seeing is Believing" by Peter Biskind
"The Golden Turkey Awards" by Harry and Michael Medved

Mark Leeper

Finding out about an unknown film:
Leonard Maltin MOVIE AND VIDEO GUIDE
Donald C. Willis HORROR AND SCIENCE FICTION FILMS: A CHECKLIST
Walt Lee REFERENCE GUIDE TO FANTASTIC FILMS
Phil Hardy THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SCIENCE FICTION MOVIES
Phil Hardy THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HORROR MOVIES
The Internet

Survey of the fields
General horror: Carlos Clarens AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF THE HORROR FILM
Jeremy Dyson BRIGHT DARKNESS
```

German expressionism: Siegfried Kracauer FROM CALIGARI TO HITLER
Lotte Eisner THE HAUNTED SCREEN
British horror: David Pirie A HERITAGE OF HORROR
Jonathan Rigby ENGLISH GOTHIC
All somewhat superceded by The Internet

Detail on single films:
Bill Warren KEEP WATCHING THE SKIES
Michael Brunas UNIVERSAL HORRORS
Stuart Galbraith IV JAPANESE SCIENCE FICTION, FANTASY, AND HORROR FILMS

Detail on filmmakers, etc.: Ephraim Katz THE FILM ENCYCLOPEDIA

General usefulness: Senn & Johnson FANTASTIC CINEMA SUBJECT GUIDE

Internet sites for information and opinion:
http://us.imdb.com/search.html The Internet Movie Database
http://www.mrqe.com/ The Movie Review Query Engine

MaryAnn Johanson
I'm an Internet gal, so most of my references are online,
but here's a couple books I love and use all the time:
"The Film Encyclopedia" by Ephraim Katz
"VideoHound's Golden Movie Retriever"
(what I love about this are the indexes organized by movie subject)

Online: The Internet Movie Database, of course http://us.imdb.com

For finding reviews: Rotten Tomatoes http://www.rottentomatoes.com/
Movie Review Query Engine http://www.mrqe.com/

For finding out DVD/video release dates: VideoETA http://www.videoeta.com/

For production news: Greg's Previews http://movies.yahoo.com/upcoming/

For classic films: The Greatest Films http://www.greatestfilms.org

Michael Marano

Books:
Leonard Maltin MOVIE AND VIDEO GUIDE
Bill Warren KEEP WATCHING THE SKIES
John Stanley CREATURE FEATURES MOVIE GUIDE
Michael Weldon PSYCHOTRONIC ENCYCLOPEDIA OF FILM
Stuart Galbraith, JAPANESE SCIENCE FICTION, FANTASY, AND HORROR FILMS
John Clute and Peter Nicholls, THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SCIENCE FICTION
Michael Weldon PSYCHOTRONIC VIDEO GUIDE

On-line resources:
Official Hammer Movies Web Site http://www.hammerfilms.com/index.html
Drew's Script-O-Rama http://www.script-o-rama.com
The Astounding B Monster http://www.bmonster.com

*What I like to call "Combined Punches"--books that,
combined with seeing specific films, can teach you an awful lot about movies:
Ira Levin, ROSEMARY'S BABY combined with Polanski's film.
Marshall McLuhan, UNDERSTANDING MEDIA and THE MEDIUM IS THE MASSAGE
combined with Cronenberg's VIDEODROME.
Robert Bloch, PSYCHO combined with Hitchcock and Van Sant's PSYCHO(s).
Nigel Kneale's first three Quatermass teleplays, THE QUATERMASS EXPERIMENT,
QUATERMASS II and QUATERMASS AND THE PIT (published in book form by Penguin)
combined with the Hammer film adaptations, THE CREEPING UNKNOWN, ENEMY FROM
SPACE,
and FIVE MILLION YEARS TO EARTH.

Peter Watkins, THE WAR GAME combined with his "fake" documentary film
of the same name.

F. Brett Cox
Internet Movie Database (imdb.com): Absolutely invaluable
The Science Fiction, Horror, and Fantasy Film Review
(http://members.fortunecity.com/roogulator): comprehensive coverage
Locus Online (http://www.locusmag.com): The links page may be the best out
there for all things SF/F/H, with the "Movies, Showbiz" category
of particular relevance to film fans
Nick Martin and Marsha Porter, "Video and DVD Guide" (annual):
I gave up on Leonard Maltin after he gave "Bladerunner" two stars.
Martin and Porter are even more user-friendly since they went to an
across-the-board alphabetical list of all movies, and the actor and director
indexes are very useful.
John Clute and Peter Nichols, "The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction"
and
John Clute and John Grant, "The Encyclopedia of Fantasy":
although focused mainly on written literature, many thorough entries on film and
TV
Michael Weldon, "The Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film"
and "Psychotronic Video Guide": old favorites
Bill Warren, "Keep Watching the Skies": ditto
Stephen King, "Danse Macabre": It may seem odd to refer to anything by
King as "underrated," but I've always been impressed by what he has to
say here.
David Skal, "The Monster Show": a fascinating and informative read
Carol Clover, "Men, Women, and Chainsaws": An academic's highly
sympathetic and (I think) very accessible view of horror movies
Roger Ebert's reviews: Ebert is, as far as I know, the only major mainstream
film critic who was active in SF fandom when he was a kid; he even published at
least one SF story in _Amazing_ in the seventies. I'm always interested in his
views on genre movies.
Lucius Shepard's reviews (F&SF and elsewhere): Elitist, curmudgeonly,
insightful,
and entertaining, whether you agree with them or not

Evelyn C. Leeper may be reached via e-mail or you may visit her Homepage.

| Return to Index | Other Conventions | FANAC Homepage |