Lunacon 94
An abbreviated convention report by Evelyn C. Leeper

This is an abbreviated con report, since we attended Lunacon only on Saturday. As a result, I'm not sure what the attendance was, etc. I *am* sure that no one but I would call a 10,000-word convention abbreviated!

Hotel

The hotel this year was the Rye Brook Hilton. It *still* seems as though Lunacon moves every few years or so. This "New York" convention hasn't been in New York City for quite a while, and has often left the state as well. The space was adequate, but the hotel layout was so confusing that it took me a while just to find registration!

Dealers' Rooms

There were two dealers rooms across the hall from each other. There were also additional guest rooms used for dealers rooms ("Dealers Row") on an adjoining corridor. (This was also true in 1991, in a completely different hotel.) There was more non-book stuff than *I* was interested in, but even though I had just been to Boskone last month, I did find a few books I was looking for.

Art Show

There was an art show; I didn't get to it.

Programming

I feel like I was in a whirlwind--in eight hours I did three panels and attended three others. There was certainly no lack of good panels during the day, though the evening looked somewhat sparse if you weren't interested in the masquerade. There were some Sunday panels I wish I could have attended as well.

Hypercritical: New and Noteworthy (and Not Worthy)
Saturday, 10 AM
Marvin Kaye (mod), Keith De Candido, Elisa De Carlo, Evelyn Leeper, Gordon Van Gelder

[Thanks to Mark, who took notes for me for this panel.]

The panel began with introductions. Keith De Candido is connected with the Manhattan cable show "The Chronic Rift." Elisa De Carlo wrote *The Devil You Say* and *Strong Spirits* (which I recommended). Marvin Kaye mentioned the latest book he edited, *The Game Is Afoot* (of Sherlock Holmes pastiches), and his next, *The Histrionic Holmes*. I introduced myself as well, but you all know me.

Kaye began by saying that he did most of his science fiction, fantasy, and horror reading for the column he writes for a horror magazine (*Bleak House*?). He reads more mysteries than science fiction because he reads mysteries to judge the Nero Wolfe award in that field. He did recommend Morgan Llywelyn's *Elementals* and Paula Volsky's *Wolf of Winter*, as well as Patricia Mullen's *Stone Movers*, which described as "an extensive epic."

De Carlo liked the latest "Star Trek" novel (which she couldn't remember the title of), and didn't like *Zeus and Company*, even though it was from her own publisher. She then drifted somewhat off-topic by noting that her publisher refused to put good reviews for *Strong Spirits* on the first page of *The Devil You Say*.

I strongly recommended Michael Bishop's *Brittle Innings*, and also Norman Spinrad's *Deus X*, Harry Turtledove's *Guns of the South*, Alan Lightman's *Einstein's Dreams*, Jack Womack's *Elvissey*, and Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars*. My biggest disappointment of the past year was Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle's *Gripping Hand*. De Candido said that book had been commissioned by Pocket Books rather than being something they wanted to write on their own. I pointed out that in "Niven's Laws" Larry Niven says, "It is a sin to waste the reader's time," and that in those terms I would call this book a sin.

De Candido then promoted "Brian Froud's Faerielands," a four-book series that he is producing for Bantam, with artwork by Froud and stories by Charles De Lint (*The Wild Wood*), Patricia McKillip, Midori Snyder, and Terri Windling. I didn't like the first book very much--it was beautifully produced, but the story was weak--but decided it would not be tactful to say so. I did say that it was enjoyable to hold a well-made book (and that is certainly true).

Kaye asked what impact reviews and critics had on the sales of books (taking the panel into the almost inevitable marketing direction rather than doing more recommendations, in part because most of the panelists had forgotten to bring their lists). He began by saying that the best novel he wrote last year was reviewed by *Kirkus* and "they weren't even snotty." He didn't say what effect this had, making it a somewhat random comment. De Candido said that many magazines (such as the *Library Journal*) are read by a very small segment of the population, and even those magazines ignore a large number of books, especially original paperback publications. (*Publishers Weekly* does review them, but in a separate section.) On the other hand, a review in the newspaper of the home town of the author can make a substantial difference in sales there, because of the "local" factor. Similarly, reviews in small press magazines that specialize in the area of the book can be very valuable.

Leo Duroshenko in the audience said that *Locus* seemed to like everything it reviewed. De Candido disputed this, saying it depended on circumstances. *Ansible 80* reported that at the 1993 World Fantasy Con "[David Drake] liked the panel 'in which David Hartwell and Charlie Brown proved that the reviews in *Locus* are worthless to the general reader by Charlie's intent rather than his ineptitude. I suppose watching someone burn himself alive could be interesting in the same fashion.'" I don't know the details, but would love to hear them!

I mentioned the statistic quoted by Mark Olson at the Boskone "Small Press" panel, which was that a good review increases sales only about five or six percent. (That's for a small press book, where the clientele is probably more knowledgeable. For a mass-market book, it would probably be an even smaller percentage, unless the review appears in the *New York Times Book Review* or someplace similar.)

Kaye said that he would rather have a review that hated the book but understood what he was trying to do than a review that liked the book but missed the point. (I suspect many authors would have a different opinion.) I noted that even a negative review can sell a book, as I have had people tell me that they know if I dislike a book, they will like it, and vice versa. If nothing else, a negative review does tell the reader that the book is out there, and if it is in a specialty niche (for example, a Sherlock Holmes pastiche or an alternate history), then that knowledge can often outweigh the negativeness of the review. And of course if the reviews are very short (as they are in *Science Fiction Chronicle* and some other magazines) then there is little room for more than a bare-bones description anyway.

De Candido said that part of the problem is the volume of books out there; some books just get lost. He is particularly irked when a reviewer doesn't review the new book in a series, saying "We've reviewed this series already." (Of course, often the series is more a product than a book, and there is little point to using space to review the fourth book which is pretty much like the first three, when there are new and different books to review.) De Candido has some personal interest in having reviewers review each book in a series, because he is involved in producing many series for Byron Preiss, including the aforementioned "Faerielands" series, the "Robots in Time" series I have recently reviewed, and the "Dinosaurs in Time" series. De Candido said that they get a lot of letters from

children who love the latter series: whole classes read it, they send pictures they've drawn of the dinosaurs, and so on. Still, the series phenomenon is not one I am greatly enamored of. When I receive review copies, I often get half a dozen books at one time that are all of the sort "book 4 of the Ring of Time series" or "the first of the exciting new Cauldron of Fear series." I see this as an infinity of mirrors, stretching off, and have little desire to launch myself into the middle of a series, or to start what could be a life-long commitment. (Kaye says that every time he tries to read anything Michael Moorcock, he emerges half a dozen books later to discover he still hasn't caught up.) Though De Candido says that some series try to make each book self-contained, most do not, and this leads to dilemmas for reviewers. I mean, I liked Harry Turtledove's *Worldwar: In the Balance* but it's the first quarter of a story that was chopped into four pieces to be sold as four books, and I can't honestly recommend to readers that they spend $84 for this story. And De Candido said that Byron Preiss would be doing anthologies and novels of Marvel superheroes, including a Spiderman novel by Diane Duane. (Pardon me if I don't get all excited.) De Carlo said that rumor has been going around for a while that the ultimate best-selling book would be titled *The Dragon, the Unicorn, and the Vampire*, and Van Gelder said that the Science Fiction Book Club would buy it.

There was a lot of discussion off-topic having to do with promoting and selling books. De Carlo said that she had to do her own publicity tour for her first book, for which she was not reimbursed, because the publishers tend to promote the bigger (thicker) books. She also noted it was ignored by *Publishers Weekly*, to which De Candido responded that they split their reviews at that magazine, and there's a shortage of people who can do intelligent reviews of science fiction. De Carlo also complained about her books not being put on display at conventions, not being able to do readings at large stores (they say, "We don't do readings of little paperbacks"), having to ask to be assigned a publicist, and having to photocopy her own reviewer's galleys to get them sent out. I observed that perhaps one way to choose good book was to choose small (thin) books: since everyone has such a bias towards thick books, if a thin book actually does get published, it really must be good. In particular, I recommended the Bantam Spectra novella series (such as Spinrad's *Deus X* which I had mentioned earlier). De Candido said that shorter novels are often aimed towards teenagers but can be charming for adults. Kaye seconded that and recommended in particular Caroline Stevermer's *College of Magicks* and the works of Teddy Slater, Daniel Pinkwater, and John Bellairs. (I read very little "young adult" science fiction; I started out by reading adult science fiction short stories.)

Since publishers seem to prefer thicker books, it was suggested that authors should request wide margins and thick paper. An audience member said that a larger point size would also be a good idea, especially for readers with less than perfect eyesight. Even now publishers use different sizes of type, though they tend to be within a small range. In my experience, only very thick classic novels (such as *Moby Dick*) use a noticeably smaller point size, but even something not obvious to the average reader could make a difference to people with poor eyesight.

The authors on the panel talked more about promotional tours. Kaye said he was scheduled to do two readings in Barnes & Nobles. He complained that these were not in the one nearest him on the Upper West Side, even though at that one they did have three other novelists scheduled, including one who is "terrible." (But he did say they have good coffee.) He said that one of the things you learn in publishing and writing seminars is how to get the publishers take over after you've finished writing. Some publishers are good at promoting novels; others are not. De Candido said that Tor was very good at promoting, in part because they started as a "labor of love" and needed to promote. In any case, authors have some influence in whom publishers send review copies to (at least in my experience) and should encourage them to send to some of the "smaller" magazines that the publisher might not think of automatically. (I noted that the readership of *rec.arts.sf.reviews* on Usenet is 54,000 and of *rec.arts.books* 120,000, giving them considerably wider distribution than *Locus*, for example.) Kaye said that the winner of the Nero Award last year was a novel the publisher didn't want to bother to submit, and that the publisher had to be asked several times.

There was also a brief listing of authors who live in Ireland--this was clearly a panel that could not stay on-topic.

There were other recommendations given toward the end. De Candido recommended Emma Bull's *Finder* as a rock and roll urban fantasy, which led Kaye to say that his most recent book, *Fantastique*, patterned on Berlioz's "Symphony Fantastique," down to the lengths of the chapters corresponding to the lengths of the movements. (I observed that if this was the case, he shouldn't be surprised if reviewers didn't realize what he was doing, but he said there was a prefatory note explaining it.) The various books in the "Fairy Tale" series were recommended; I especially liked the most recent, *Briar Rose* by Jane Yolen, and also recommended *Snow White, Blood Red* edited by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling. While not officially in the series, it is similarly thematically and has a similar Tom Canty cover. Also mentioned was *Drink Down the Moon*, de Lint's sequel to his *Jack the Giant Killer*. Van Gelder recommended *The Well-Favored Man* by Elizabeth Willey and *The Element of Fire* by Martha Wells. Kaye said that *The Enemy Within* in the "Ravenoff" series by Christy Golden was better done than he generally encounters. De Candido suggested Rosemary Edgehill's *Speak Daggers to Her*. (Rosemary Edghill is also known as Eluki bes Shahar.) Another recommendation was *The Golden* by Lucius Shepard.

Alternate Religion in SF and Fantasy
Saturday, 11AM
John Boardman, Mary Frey, Nancy C. Hanger, Simon Lang, John Lee, Nancy Springer

I got to this a little bit late, and had a heck of a time matching up participants' names to people on the panel, probably because I didn't realize that Simon Lang was a woman.

Though the topic was alternate religions, there was much discussion of present-day Earth religions (mostly Western religions), as you will see. The panel began by defining religion as the "organized worship of a deity." I guess that means that Buddhism, which has no deity per se, is not a religion. Note that this definition also makes a distinction between religion and faith.

Boardman proposed the idea that many writers are anti-clerical and use alternate religions as a safety net--they can attack a non-existent religion to avoid getting into trouble by attacking a real one. He gave as an example a Philip Jose Farmer story that satirized Judaism in a post-holocaust world--if anyone knows the name of that story, please let me know. Boardman also claimed later that Glen Cook didn't care for any religion because he has several fighting each other--which is not at all the conclusion that I believe one should draw from that. In any case, even with fictional religions, it is sometimes hard to get that part of the story past the editor and the sales force.

Someone from the audience asked if a people's "aspect" (appearance?) affects their interface with infinity. Someone else said something about how people must "realize there's no order without an orderer," an old--and not very respected--argument for the existence of God. Lang said that religions all had three parts: pathway, propitiation, and fertility. She felt that a society certainly affected a religion, saying, "Religions are created as mirrors to society." (As you can tell, non sequiturs abounded here, as "answers" from the panel often had little or nothing to do with the questions, and the whole hour had a very stream-of-consciousness feel.)

Someone asked what effect the discovery of alien life will/would have on our view of religion or God. From the answers, it was clear that the panelists thought only of Western religions when thinking of "our religions," since they commented that aliens who had six arms would probably have six-armed gods, and that we would have to deal with the aliens' view(s) of deity. First, this sounds like an answer to the first question in the last paragraph, and second, this assumes that there are no religions on Earth that have such gods. One can only assume that the Hindu pantheon (for example) is as alien to the panelists as, well, *alien* pantheons would be. Lang did answer the question ("how will we deal with the aliens' view of deity?") by saying we would "ignore it, despise it, or make war on it." Later people noted that in religion, it often seems that the closer a religion is to ours, the less we tolerate it, and that the most violent wars are against "heretics" rather than "pagans."

A long digression on the conflicting views of Jesuits and Franciscans ensued, reinforcing my opinion

of the Western (and even more specifically Christian) emphasis of the panel.

Someone (probably in a desperate attempt to get back on-topic) asked what an author does when inventing a religion. A panelist said that when Stephen Donaldson was asked this, he responded, "We are writers, we can invent; we don't have to do research." Nevertheless, the panelists felt that authors do research religion in general for commonalities that could be used (the pathway, propitiation, and fertility aspects mentioned earlier, for example).

It seems to be possible, one person averred, to separate religions into two types: the type that says, "God is out there somewhere," and the type that says, "God is next door and you can visit him." I'm not sure whether these are differences between religions, or between different types of faith. (Remember that at the beginning there was a distinction made between religion and faith.)

Missionaries and their place in all this were mentioned. L. Sprague de Camp wrote a story that used an analogy to represent missionaries (according to one panelist--I guess this was an example of trying to couch an anti-church bias in different terms). In the story, humans meet a saurian race that uses body paint the way we use clothing. The clothing market on Earth sees this as a great chance to open a new market and goes off to sell clothes to the saurians. When they return to Earth, however, they find that the saurians have convinced humans to stop wearing clothing and use paint instead. Unfortunately, I can think of no similar situation where religion A goes off to convert people from religion B, and vice versa--and both are successful.

Many of the "side-effects" of religion were mentioned. For example, monarchies depend on the "divine right of kings"--without gods, there would be no monarchies, at least in the sense we know them. Hanger claimed that in addition all "higher" civilizations had or have a benevolent deity, but since she didn't define "higher" I suspect this turns out to be true because "higher" turns out to be those civilizations that have a benevolent diety.

Someone in the audience complained that fantasy novels almost always have everyone believing the same thing--there don't seem to be any denominations on these other worlds. One of the panelists claimed this was true in the Middle Ages (I would argue that it was not--it's just that we ignore a lot of the distinctions or sects that were eventually wiped out), but also agreed that a lot of it was either laziness or economy on the part of the author. If the story isn't about doctrinal differences, adding them to it just complicates things unnecessarily.

As to whether a culture *always* develops a religion, one person claimed that even gorillas have ritual dances to the moon. (I don't find this ultimately convincing.) Another quoted Disraeli as having said, "We all believe in some sort of a something somewhere." James P. Hogan's *World from Yesteryear* was cited as a book in which the society has no religion. Lang observed that there might even be belief systems that we failed to recognize as religions in real life, but if a book were that subtle it wouldn't work, because that would defeat the purpose of having it in there. And we have a definite tendency to label anything we don't understand as religious in nature: if we dig up an artifact that we can't think of a specific purpose for, we say it is a ritual object. David Macaulay's *Motel of the Mysteries* is the perfect satire on this tendency.

Someone suggested that if we contacted aliens, their religion might become the "religion du jour," as many people either adopted it, or combined it with ours. Certainly on our world, religions have adopted parts of other religions as they encountered them. (Someone--I think it was Boardman--said that Rose Kennedy, a *very* devout Catholic, once fired a maid for dumping dishwater down the back steps and insulting the "little people.")

Another theory of civilization and religion put forward by Boardman was that increased "civilization" results in the diminution of the number of gods. While it is true that originally Judaism didn't claim that there existed only one God, merely that Jews should worship only one, I think the generalization of this is totally wrong. First of all, we need a metric to determine what is "more" or "less" civilized.

(Of course, this hearkens back to Hanger's claim earlier that all "higher" civilizations had or have a benevolent deity, with exactly the same stumbling block.) And second, the obvious extrapolation of this is that the most advanced civilization would have no gods. Actually, the correct answer is that the most advanced civilization would have exactly the number of gods that exist, and any claim by someone as to what this would be is colored by their opinion of the number of gods that *they* think exist. However, someone else thought that the diminution of the number of gods was merely a consolidation of the various aspects into a single persona, and didn't represent a radically different view of the godhead.

The panel closed with the observation that one thing was predictable: as we meet more people (and aliens) who are different, we will probably become "more" of our own religion. This has been the pattern in the past, and one might consider it the spiritual equivalent of "pulling the wagons into a circle" as a means of defense.

The Once King: the Historical Arthur
Saturday, 1PM
Nancy C. Hanger (mod), John Boardman, Marina Frants, Roberta Gellis, Debra Meskys, Jane T. Sibley

Two books were recommended at the start of this panel: *The Arthurian Encyclopedia* by Norris J. Lacy (1986, 649 pages) and *The King Arthur Companion* by Phyllis Ann Karr (1983, 174 pages) though they are more about literature than about the historical Arthur. (Actually, there is a 1991 revised and expanded version of the Lacy called *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia* and having 577 pages--and, yes, I know that's *fewer* pages than the "unexpanded" version.) Meskys's magazine *Neikas* had a special Arthurian issue which is out of print now, but scheduled to be reprinted.

The panelists talked about their experiences with the various literary versions of the King Arthur story. Boardman said he was turned off by Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, but turned on by Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, even though he agrees that Malory is grossly anachronistic. Meskys liked T. H. White's *Once and Future King*, which she described as being a sort of "alternate timeline." She also recommended Mary Stewart's trilogy *Crystal Cave*, *The Hollow Hills*, and *The Last Enchantment*. As she put it, "Stewart really makes it believable." Gellis said she liked Malory and Coleridge. (If Coleridge did something on King Arthur, I can't find it.) Silby likes them all.

Boardman sees Arthur as an archetype. When the panelists discussed why other "heroes" were not as popular, Gellis said that Arthur was more sympathetic than most, and gave the example of Charlemagne as an unsympathetic hero. (Boskone XXVI in 1989 even had a panel titled "Why Not Charlemagne?"--I will not include all my comments on that here!) Sibley notes that Arthur is also British, and hence "home-grown" to most English-speaking readers. (I suppose this displays a certain Anglocentrism in her/our view of the world. This tendency of preferring "home-grown" heroes explains why the Golem of Prague is much more popular among Jewish science fiction fans than among the fannish population at large.) Gellis thought that in addition, the Arthurian story is more cheerful than the French epics or other contenders. And the panelists noted that one of the major sources of strife in the Arthurian legend, Lancelot, was a purely literary invention, and was probably added by the French. In terms of the historical Arthur, Lancelot represents a merging of Gawain and Mordred, particularly as described in Geoffrey of Monmouth's version from the 12th Century.

Hanger sees Arthur's appeal as being a noble yet tragic hero in a story of love and betrayal. For all his virtues, Arthur also has human faults. She sees him as a "continuation" of the Irish hero Cuchulain (pronounced "koo-hoo'-lin"). (It was noted in this discussion that Irish--Gaelic--is even less phonetic than English, and that the Norse idiom for "It's Greek to me" is "He's talking Irish." On the other hand, I am a bit sceptical of someone who pronounces Celtic as "sel'-tik.") Classic Greek tragic heroes had their fatal flaws (Oedipus had his hubris, for example), and even the gods had their fatal flaws: Achilles's heel, Baldur's susceptibility to mistletoe, etc. One of the causes of Arthur's downfall was his seduction by his half-sister, which was a literary addition, not by Malory, but some time

around the 13th Century. One theory proposed was that this was added to suggest to the reader/listener that you always have the seeds of your own destruction within you. (And Galahad was added because the Church didn't want the "morally questionable" Lancelot as the hero.) Another theory was that the incest motif was added because Mordred's claim to the kingship was originally as Arthur's sister's son, a lineage valid in Celtic law but not in English law. Therefore, English readers/listeners of the Middle Ages would not be able to make sense of Mordred's claim to the throne, so a direct claim was added.

Panelists discussed the many cultures that have a sleeper or sleeping king who will return in times of trouble (the Golem again?). One person mentioned Fletcher Pratt's *Land of Unreason* as having this theme; someone else suggested that Jesus was another "sleeping king." From this thought someone else was reminded that Arthur also ordered a slaughter of infants, which most people thought would not make a popular story (though it was claimed James Morrow was the ideal person to write it).

Hanger said one of the main problems with studying Arthur is the proliferation of badly researched books that are attempting to jump on a bandwagon rather than increase the knowledge of the subject. Even respected authors seem to have gone astray. From the beginning, William of Malmesbury's account differed from Geoffrey of Monmouth's. More recently, Norma Lorre Goodrich claimed that the French word that is translated as "bird" in most texts should really be translated as "altar" (or maybe it was the other way around). The Round Table was a 19th Century addition to the legend (I'm not sure this is correct--at least one source I read attributes it to Malory in the 15th Century), yet that is what most people know the best. The romance between Guinevere and Lancelot is from Cretien de Troyes in the 12th Century. And who knows what else people think of that was only introduced in the Lerner & Lowe musical? (Certainly the reference to stopping for a cup of tea was grossly anachronistic there!) But since even the earliest sources dispute the dates of Arthur's life and death, it is impossible to be completely accurate. One theory is that some of the events attributed to Arthur may actually have been connected with a son or nephew also named Arthur.

On the other hand, do we really want or care about historical accuracy? Gellis thinks not. What we want, according to her, is to fulfill the goal of the Society for Creative Anachronism--"to celebrate the Middle Ages as it should have been."

There was a dispute between Gellis (who claimed the sacrificial elements in the Arthur story were Christian) and Sibley (who claimed they were Celtic). As a disinterested bystander, I might claim that they are both, because the concept of sacrifice, and in particular sacrifice of/by the leader of the community, is a common thread through many religions. (I think the panelists also mentioned this, and suggested *The Golden Bough* by Sir James Frazer as a basic text about comparative religion; Frazer is best known for his theory of the sacrifice of the priest-king as archetypal across cultures.) Boardman described this as "government strong enough to protect us and just enough not to oppress us"--one can't help but feel that he has a definite political agenda here, but the concept of a "benevolent monarchy" has appealed to people in the past.

All this is similar to the tales of Robin Hood, which tend to be added to, modified, and moved around in time. Another similar hero who transcends time and space seems to be the Flying Dutchman, also found as Peter Rugg and even Charlie of the MTA.

The movie *Knightriders* was given as an updating of the Arthur legend worth seeing. Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Mists of Avalon* got favorable mention, as did William Mayne's *Earthfasts*, and also *The Child Queen* by Nancy MacKenzie, due out in August.

(Note to convention program planners: Nancy Hanger is very good at "taking the panel back" from panelists who tend to monopolize it; I recommend her as a moderator.)

Reinventing the Wheel of If: Alternate History
Saturday, 3PM

Moshe Feder (mod), John Boardman, Evelyn C. Leeper, Vonda N. McIntyre, Mark Olson, Christopher Rowley

[Thanks to Mark, who took notes for me for this panel.]

There were the usual introductions. People who have read my various Boskone reports know that Olson is a long-time fan of alternate histories, and Boardman, McIntyre, and Rowley are well-known authors. Feder is the editor of the Military Book Club.

We began with definitions. I said that an alternate history, for me, has to be something grounded in a historical change. Just saying that it's the same world except that magic works, for example, does not make an alternate history (which is not to say that those can't be enjoyable--I loved Esther Friesner's *Druid's Blood*, which falls into this category). Why is it science fiction? Well, you could do some hand-waving and say that it is because the changes are caused by changes at the quantum level, etc., but the fact is that alternate history stories are science fiction because science fiction fans read them. (This is addressed later--stay tuned.) Boardman said that he started reading alternate histories with such stories as Sir Winston Churchill's "If Lee had not Won the Battle of Gettysburg," something by Anatole France (though I can't find any Anatole France stories in the Usenet alternate history bibliography), and Murray Leinster's "Sidewise in Time," which were the stories that got the field moving and got people thinking how nice things would be if they had turned out differently. Olson said that he started with L. Sprague de Camp's *Lest Darkness Fall* and Mark Twain's *Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. (Boardman noted that in the latter all the changes were eventually negated, so perhaps it should be classified as a secret history rather than an alternate history.)

Feder wanted to make a distinction between worlds in which the change is a given, and those in which someone is doing the changes. Well, yes, you can split them that way, but to what purpose? (I guess the latter imply time travel, while the former don't.)

Rowley felt that in today's market--presumably meaning readers who were historical literate as well as science fiction fans--you needed to work out your consequences well. When alternate histories were young, the novelty would carry them to some extent, but today everyone is looking closely at exactly what happens in your story after you decide to have the Manhattan Project fail (or whatever). For that matter, they are also looking at *why* your Manhattan Project fails, and if *that* makes sense. Olson agreed that this attention to detail was what made a novel such as Harry Turtledove's *Guns of the South* such a good book, and that even though he (Olson) wasn't a Civil War buff, he could appreciate it. He also felt that Turtledove did a good job of presenting a balanced view of the South, as opposed to what one used to see in less sophisticated alternate histories (or for that matter, probably still do in some markets). (There was some concern that we were revealing too much of the plot in discussing the book, but I don't think the key points were actually supposed to be kept a secret.)

Someone in the audience asked if there were any alternate histories in which Charles I won the English Civil War. Yes-- John Whitbourn's *A Dangerous Energy* (that chronological listing by divergence is *really* useful for questions like this!) Someone else said that everyone does the same old thing, giving the example that no one has Germany winning World War *I*. Immediately several people jumped on that, mentioning among other stories, Fritz Leiber's "Catch That Zeppelin." Other stories with this premise include Tom Purdom's "Redemption of August," Stephen Leacock's "If Germany Had Won," and Guido Morselli's *Past Conditional: A Retrospective Hypothesis*. But Feder agreed that World War II was far more popular, no doubt because it was bigger and "juicier." Also, Americans don't understand World War I. We came in late in the war, it happened a long time ago, and it happened somewhere else. Feder gave the example that there might be some fascinating critical points in Japanese history but he hasn't read enough to know what they are. Conversely, the common change points are overdone because authors just don't know enough of any other history.

Someone suggested that we should "talk favorites." Rowley's included Philip K. Dick's *Man in the*

High Castle and Keith Roberts's *Pavane*. Olson repeated that Turtledove's *Guns of the South* was very good. Boardman said that he liked James P. Hogan's *Proteus Operation*, "which gives you three alternate histories for the price of one." He particularly liked that Hogan told us why he was writing it--that he had read a claim that Germany was rebuilt as a bulwark against Communism. (Of course, that's why the Church backed Nazi Germany during the 1930s, after all.) I mentioned Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee* as a classic, though other panel members didn't think it was very good. (Well, I didn't like *The Man in the High Castle* that much, so I guess it evens out.) I also recommended Gregory Benford and Martin H. Greenberg' first two anthologies *What Might Have Been 1* and *2* and Mike Resnick's *Alternate Presidents* and *Alternate Kennedys*. (I didn't think his later *Alternate Warriors* or *By Any Other Fame* were that good.)

Feder asked if there were any alternate histories in which Christianity doesn't rise to prominence and "Rome goes Jewish"? Boardman immediately responded yes, and I was able to add that there was one by Kim Newman and Eugene Byrne in Brian Stableford's *Tales of the Wandering Jew* called, perhaps not surprisingly, "The Wandering Christian." McIntyre mentioned John M. Ford's *Dragon Waiting* in which Christianity is a minor, almost unknown cult.

Boardman again brought up the point made earlier by Feder that there are two kinds of alternate histories, one with time travel and one without--or rather, one in which the change is internal and one in which the changes are made by time travelers.

McIntyre pointed out that changes occurring a thousand years ago make even five hundred years ago unrecognizable. Feder agreed that this led to a certain artificiality in alternate history stories, where they have to follow only one change, but history wouldn't work like that. Boardman gave the example of a world in which the South won the Civil War, but all the (Northern) Presidents were the same--this is *extremely* unlikely. I again mentioned *Druid's Blood*, in which the change was long, long ago, yet most of the famous people in our 18th Century have exact parallels in that world. Of course, I am willing to forgive that (maybe because the book is intended humorously rather than as a serious study), but am annoyed when I see it in a more serious work.

This led Feder to ask the panelists' most and least favorite mistakes. Olson said his was forgetting that history goes on. Though it's true that China remained moderately static for a long time, it is also unlikely that a Rome that didn't fall sixteen hundred years ago would still look the same today. Boardman disliked when the change was caused by something silly (and gave the example *Bring the Jubilee*, though that didn't strike me as based on a silly change).

I said that what bothered me the most was that authors don't seem to understand causes and they don't seem to understand effects. That is, they make changes that won't bring about the scenario they have, and they have some things remain static that certainly would have been changed. My standard example of the latter is a world in which World War II never happened, yet John Kennedy is still elected President in 1960. Of course, having said that, I also confessed that Robert Silverberg's "Via Roma," set in a 19th Century Rome which never fell, avoided these pitfalls (with a couple of very minor slips) but the result was a story that left me nothing familiar to grab on to or relate to. With me, you're damned if you do and damned if you don't. Rowley suggested that this may be another reason why World War II and the American Civil War are used so often--they were recent enough that the resulting world of 1994 would have something recognizable. (Regarding World War II, Boardman said that even without Hitler, there would have been World War II, but no Holocaust. He figured Hugenberg might have been in control.)

McIntyre asked if anyone had read Peter Dickinson's stories in which Edward Duke of Clarence did not die in 1887 and went on to become King of England instead of his younger brother George. (So far there have been two: *King and Joker* and *Skeleton-in-Waiting*.) There were also mentions of Avram Davison's *Adventures in Unhistory*, which Olson recommended for a Hugo this year.

Feder suggested that there are two ways to write an alternate history: as a conventional story, or as a

textbook-style description. In the latter category, the outstanding example is Robert Sobel's *For Want of a Nail ...; If Burgoyne Had Won at Saratoga, a 1973 book which assumes Burgoyne beat Gates at Saratoga and the American rebellion collapsed. It is a full-length history text of the "Confederation of North America" and the "United States of Mexico," complete with completely fictitious bibliography and completely fictitious publishing information on the copyright page! Why someone doesn't reprint this, I don't know--it is marvelous!*

It was mentioned that Harry Turtledove, in addition to his "Worldwar" series, was working on an alternate history in which there was no American Revolution. Called The Two Georges, it is being co-authored with Richard Dreyfuss. Olson noted that there was a famous painting by Gainsborough called "The Two Georges"; I added that people on the Net were already suggesting that it should be used as the cover art.

Someone in the audience asked about Fatherland (by Robert Harris). This and Turtledove's Guns of the South have become the best-known alternate histories in the last few years. (The announcement that Fatherland is "soon to be a major motion picture" didn't hurt it.) Rowley said that he thought Fatherland was good; it was "coherent and pretty believable." I mentioned that earlier Len Deighton had written SS-GB along similar lines.

Feder asked if we imagined our own history as an alternate world, where did we go wrong? Rowley suggested that the invention of gunpowder was a bad idea. Olson pointed out that since we are all the results of this world and its population explosion, he isn't too thrilled with changing things. McIntyre felt that she would like to change the contempt of the Christian church for women. Boardman thought that the status of women had reached a nadir in the 19th Century (at least in Western civilization), and that now only was it better now than a century ago, but it had been better earlier as well. He also asked if anyone knew of a non-religious argument against feminism.

I noted that much of what is wrong with the world is also what brings about progress, and I want to know if I get rid of the Black Death, what am I getting instead? Olson added that the Black Death freed Europe from being static (like China).

After all this discussion, the panel agreed that one thing science fiction and alternate histories have in common is that they are both about world-building. Classical science fiction changes the physical constraints; alternate histories change the historical. So maybe this "world-building" is the science fiction/alternate history connection.

Someone in the audience asked about the 14th and 15th Century Chinese explorations--what if they had reached Europe? Boardman thought they were probably referring to the Yuan (Mongol) Dynasty which was from 1279 to 1368. Of course, it wasn't as if China didn't know about Europe. As someone asked, "Did you ever hear of Marco Polo?" Olson felt that the expansion was doomed because the emperor required too much control. McIntyre asked what might have happened if the Chinese had gotten across the Pacific. This was deemed somewhat unlikely unless they went via Alaska--the Pacific Ocean is very wide. Olson added that had the Chinese gotten to North America, they might have released horses there, and that would have made a difference, since all native American horses had gone extinct before the Spaniards arrived. Boardman said he thought the Appaloosa of the Nez Perce tribe was a native breed that had not become extinct during the Ice Ages, but I don't believe that is true. According to Grolier's Academic On-Line Encyclopedia, for example, "the [Nez Perce] Plateau culture acquired Plains traits after the introduction (c. 1700) of the horse simulated trade and war contacts." (As an observation, this means that some of the "traditional" culture that the Europeans are accused of destroying was in fact created by their presence as well.)

Someone wanted to get back to the Chinese Khan whose fleet was sunk in a storm. (Feder noted that storms seem to stop armadas in many cultures.) Someone else said that the Khan Dynasty (Mongol Dynasty?) extended all the way to the Caspian Sea, and the Chinese were well aware of Europe. (Well, we knew that.) Feder said he thought the original question would have been better phrased as

referring to oceanic contact with other civilizations.

An audience member said that it seemed to him as if most alternate histories were based on some violent premise (although I'm not sure the non-existence of a war could properly be termed that), and asked if there were any based on non-violent events. Well of course there are dozens, probably hundreds, based on changes in scientific discoveries, etc., but a recent source might be Mike Resnick's Alternate Presidents anthology, which looks at what might have happened if various Presidential elections or other events turned out differently. Boardman thought that most of the stories were wildly improbable (I have to agree that the premise that Victoria Woodhull might have been elected President in 1872 is extremely unlikely). Feder mentioned a story in which Lincoln becomes a sad and forgotten man, but I don't think he gave the title or author. (It could possibly be Lloyd Lewis's "If Lincoln Had Lived" or Oscar Lewis's "The Lost Years: A Biographical Fantasy.") Olson said that de Camp's Lest Darkness Fall eliminates the "Dark Ages" through technology. Someone noted that Carl Sagan had once asked what might have happened if the ancient Greeks had not become mystical. Olson responded that it wasn't mysticism; it was that they made experimental science lower class.

Are SF Readers as Literate as We Think?
Saturday, 4PM
John Hertz (mod), Moshe Feder, Michael Kandel, Evelyn C. Leeper, Darrell Schweitzer

[Thanks to Mark, who took notes for me for this panel.]

Hertz started by asking the panelists each to say something useful about themselves. His "something useful" was a handout of excerpts from classics which seemed to be somewhat random. He said audience members might or might not have run into them (well, that covers all the possibilities, I guess). (The handouts included excerpts from Rebecca West's Black Lamb and Grey Falcon, Thucydides' Peloponnesian War, Samuel Johnson's "Preface to the Works of Shakespeare," Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed, and Dante's Divine Comedy ("Purgatorio").) Actually, Hertz also said that he was an editor and discovered that he was not literate. (If you're wondering exactly what "literate" means, that was never clearly defined.)

I said that I wrote book reviews, convention reports, and trip logs, mostly on the Internet but also in such fanzines as Lan's Lantern, Phlogiston, Cyberspace Vanguard, and Alternate Worlds. In an attempt to get (more) literate, I am currently reading the novels of the Bronte sisters, Jane Austen, and Charles Dickens (as well as lots of other stuff). My observation was that I never liked the classics they assigned in school (though I often liked all the other books by the same authors), and thought that might be because they always expected you to remember all the details of the novel ("What color was Jim's coat when he went to Mary's house?"). I also related how when I read Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle's Inferno and mentioned to another fan that I liked the original better, the other fan asked, "Oh, you mean the magazine version?" This, I said, was when I realized that at least some fans were illiterate. But not all fans--Babylon 5 has a lot of literary references, including Tennyson's Idylls of the King and Mark Twain's "War Prayer"--so there was hope for the future. Maybe this will get fans reading Tennyson and Twain.

Schweitzer said he hadn't really noticed the literary references but he did note that they mentioned the space liner Asimov. I said that there was a lot of poetry recited or heard throughout the first few shows. Schweitzer thought that fans wouldn't mind as long as the literary aspect doesn't get in the way.

Kandel is a translator of Stanislaw Lem, an author (Captain Jack Zodiac), and an editor (he recently edited Jonathan Lethem's Gun with Occasional Music). He also made a stab at defining what "literate" meant, or rather what it didn't mean. He said we often say that someone is not literate if s/he has not read X, but a better distinction might be between people who read widely and people who don't. For example, one bookseller whose store sells science fiction and mysteries says that the

science fiction fans who frequent his store will also look in the mystery section, but the mystery fans do not generally look in the science fiction section. And Kandel felt that the fact that he "couldn't read" Henry Miller did not immediately exclude him from the ranks of the literate.

I commented that a lot of my non-science-fiction reading was still "inspired" by my interest in science fiction. For example, I have been reading a lot of early travelogues (of travelers from the Middle Ages through the 19th Century) and they are a lot like the classic "first contact" stories of science fiction. Feder later mentioned that he read Greek and enjoyed it, partly because it was learning about an alien society.

Schweitzer thought one of the best ways to become "literate" is to read books by cultures other than one's own, from Herodotus to Chinese novels. Not that this means one should emulate all these writers--he felt one should learn how not to write from Suetonius, who was a letter writer when people wrote letters without saying anything. As he put it, "[He] reads like the later essays of Samuel Delany. He lived through the fall of Rome and never mentioned it." He also said that Gene Wolfe learned classical Greek so that he could try to think like the classical Greeks for his writing. Of course, Schweitzer warned that it was also possible for something to be classical without being good.

I noted that people reading from other cultures with almost definitely be reading translations, and the differences in translations will affect their reactions to the works, and to the cultures. The most common example of this would be the many translations of Dante's Divine Comedy, each with a different flavor.

Hertz said that the trouble with art is that it is often hard to recognize assumptions. As he quoted, "Whoever discovered water, it wasn't fish."

As far as what makes something a classic, Feder believes that if you wait long enough, only the good works survive, and that there are standards, but that they are not absolute. Hertz disagreed somewhat, saying that what survives is what can muster support at the time (sort of like what wins the Hugo awards). Schweitzer added that if you look at the old Modern Library Classics, you would discover that there are a lot of "ex-classics," while much of science fiction is not part of the "canon." Kandel's response was that this might be true, but much of what is part of the canon is not great. Hertz agreed, saying the canon helps you but is not conclusive.

I asked how many people had read James Fenimore Cooper, an author much more popular towards the beginning of this century. It turned out that a large number of people had, thought someone noted that the popularity of the film The Last of the Mohicans may have had something to do with that. In any case, this somewhat undercut my point that Arthur Conan Doyle, who was considered a mediocre writer then, has far outlasted Cooper. (Someone else claimed that Doyle also retained his popularity because of the Holmes movies, but this was quickly dismissed as not true.) Schweitzer said that Cooper was "too observably ridiculous" when he was in high school to be read by many. "Kids would laugh at you" if you read him. Even an excerpt given in class was funny. (Well, Twain certainly managed to tear him apart quite thoroughly.)

Schweitzer said that authors were popular for reasons not connected with merit. Cooper, for example, was popular because people wanted to read about the frontier, to see some action. (Was Natty Bumppo the Arnold Schwarzenegger of his time?) Hertz felt that this was merely another argument in favor of the "test of time" theory. There can be great art, he argues, that never appeals to the masses.

We noted at this point that we had barely touched on the topic of the panel, but the fact that people were still in the room indicated that there was some interest in what we were saying.

Feder, trying to get us back on track, said that it was hard for him to say someone was "well-rounded" (literate, I presume) unless they have read certain specific books (which he didn't name).

Hertz was of the belief that if you know the "classics," or how to recognize a classic, you can get a lot more out of science fiction. He gave the analogy of a scene in Diamonds Are Forever in which James Bond is shown a stone and asked what it is worth. After he answers, he is told that the stone was just paste, and shown a real diamond. Hertz said we should be concerned with how well we read as well as how well-read we are, but that "great books magnify our sense of wonder." (The mention of James Bond resulted in Kandel saying that Natty Bumppo was the James Bond of his time. And here I thought he was the Arnold Schwarzenegger!)

Someone said that "great books" are those that have great ideas, leading Hertz to say that he hates Mortimer Adler because Adler thinks that great books are about great ideas. Hertz observed that the trouble with the "great idea" notion is that then you are open to anyone who can "twiddle" you. On the other hand, people who go back and re-read their marginalia in books after several years often find that the "great ideas" that struck them then were all wrong.

One problem with defining the "classics" is that some of them seem to be excluded by their nature. The Divine Comedy is a genre work (according to Schweitzer) and Shakespeare wrote for the mob (according to Hertz), yet both are accepted as classics, because they are more than just genre works or "pop" works. Kandel thought that as soon as you got into "high-brow" versus "low-brow," you were in a trap.

But are fans literate?

A quick survey indicated that most of the audience members read mostly science fiction, though a fair number had science fiction as only about 25% of their total reading. People said that their co-workers usually read less than them, but Hertz and I noted that in determining whether fans are literate we should be comparing them to other readers, since compared to the majority of people in the country (probably) or the world (certainly), they would be more literate simply because they read something. I observed that there was literary fiction (say John Cheever) that sells, so there must be people out there reading somewhere.

The phenomenon that a good percentage of fans want to be writers--at any rate, a higher percentage than one finds in most other fields--would probably result in increased literacy among fans, since writers tend to read a lot. (Of course, who's to say that these "wannabe" writers do the reading?) People thought in general that while readers (and writers) tend to be well-read, they are still surprisingly illiterate in areas of science. As Hertz said, "'Science' is our first name," and hence we should try to be more knowledgeable about science. Schweitzer said that may be true, but we weren't: there are a lot of crystal believers and such (whom he termed the "reality-impaired") at conventions.

Someone said that Harper's wrote some anti-science-fiction articles a few years back, and that an article there or in The Nation said that science fiction was an outgrowth of children's literature. Hertz suggested that maybe we don't care what Harper's or The Nation say and Kandel responded, "What's wrong with children's literature?"

One reason that fans may be more literate is that fandom is a place where literate people look for other literate people. Outside of fandom, there are few ways to find the literate population. The Net is one; as I said, "There are people in rec.arts.books who know more about literature than I ever will." And occasionally you will find someone at random (for example, the supervisor at work who could discuss semiotics and deconstructionism). The theatrical world also attracts literate people, although Schweitzer says they usually know even less science than we do. Some bookstores attract literate people (that's how we met George "Lan" Laskowski, for example). Basically, according to Hertz, we have worked out a cultural recognition system, and in fandom your chances of finding the literate is much greater.

Feder closed by saying that we should not be too hard on ourselves. In the 18th Century it was tough to be literate, but as society got larger there is more stuff out there. This is a two-edged sword. It's

easier to find what makes us literate, but there's so much of it that it would take more than a lifetime to read it all.

SF from Before You Were Born
Saturday, 5PM
Keith De Candido, Nancy C. Hanger, John Hertz, Andrea Lipinski, Bob Lipton

In discussing this topic, the panelists said that at first they were going to make the cut-off date somewhere around 1970, because they were worried that they wouldn't be enough to say about really early science fiction, but that turned out to be a groundless fear.

The obvious beginning was to talk about Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1818), which marked the origins of science fiction. There had been a few "questionable" inclusions before then: Lucian of Samosata's True History (second century C.E.), Cyrano de Bergerac's Voyages to the Moon and the Sun (1687), Marie Corelli's Ardath, and so on. But one reason Frankenstein was such a landmark was that it used science instead of magic. In this regard it was a product of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, and represented one side of the dichotomy between the supernatural and science. Previously there had been rationalist trends in religion, it's true, but during Shelley's time rationalism was put forth as a replacement for religion. (Perhaps as a result of this challenge, Western religions--as contrasted with Eastern religions--have a strong thread of rationalism in them. On the other hand, it is probably more accurate to say that the strong thread of rationalism in Western religion before the Enlightenment was what led Western philosophers to come up with the Enlightenment in the first place.)

This was also a period of Utopian movements as well, which resulted in such works as Samuel Butler's Erewhon (1872). Contrast Erewhon with the earlier Utopia (1516) by Thomas More (or even Swift's Gulliver's Travels (1726)). The earlier works were religious in nature; Butler and others were not. (Hertz seemed to think Jonathan Swift was "fannish.") Although later than some of the rationalist works mentioned, Stevenson's Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886) still had its roots firmly in the notion of original sin. (Although some see it as early psychoanalysis along the lines of Freud's work, Freud did not publish his first psychoanalytic work, Studies in Hysteria, until 1895.)

Hertz reminded us that although the Shelleys were both apostates in the terminology of their time, we would consider them religious today. Percy Bysshe Shelley said, in fact, "Religion has betrayed me and I have to rebuild to somehow," which indicates that he did not entirely turn his back on the concept of religion. It was also noted that religion has been "disestablished" in the United States, which means that those of us from the United States don't always realize what challenging the established religion meant in other times or other places. One of the main challenges by science to religion was the theory of evolution, which Charles Darwin first presented in 1858, and that caused considerably more tumult in the British government and society than it did here, though we did (and still do) have our share.

In Frankenstein the creature (never named, though there is an analogy made to Adam, which results in the creature often being given that name) says, in effect, "I was not created evil, and I have a right to live." This is a very science-fictional concept, just as the question of what changes in science do to humanity is a very science-fictional question.

After Shelley, Verne (who started writing novels in the 1860s) and Wells (The Time Machine (1895), The Invisible Man (1897), The War of the Worlds (1898), and other works) are the earliest authors whose works would be called science fiction now. This of course led to a discussion of what exactly science fiction was. Someone proposed Sam Moskowitz's definition: "Science fiction is a branch of fantasy in which the willing suspension of disbelief is made easier by an attempt to add an air of scientific verisimilitude." Someone else's famous definition is something like "a story that couldn't take place without its scientific content." Personally, I like Damon Knight's the best: "Science fiction is what I point to when I say it." One panelist claimed that art is on a (continuous) spectrum of

imagination, and trying to set up clear definitions was unlikely to work. For example, Robert A. Heinlein's Magic, Inc. and Poul Anderson's Operation Chaos seem to be both fantasy and science fiction. Is Twain's Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court science fiction or fantasy?

Another characteristic of science fiction is that it is knowledge-based. As Hertz expressed it, "if knowledge is important [in the story], then it's science fiction."

De Candido used this opportunity to plug his latest productions, The Essential Frankenstein, The Essential Dracula, and The Essential Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Miscellaneous

The Green Room was close to the programming and had a large assortment of beverages and light snacks. It was also a more popular gathering place than at some other conventions. (I'm not sure when the con suite was or if it was open.) The restaurant situation was less than ideal--nothing was within walking distance, and even driving didn't add a lot of options within a reasonable radius. There was no map to go with the restaurant guide, another problem.

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