

**Lunacon 2006**  
**A convention report by Evelyn C. Leeper**  
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Well, this will be a very short report, because we went for only one day (Saturday), and I ended up going to only programming items that I was on, so I could not take copious notes.

### **Hotel**

Lunacon was held March 17-19, 2006, at the Hilton Hasbrouck Heights. This was a change of venue from the original hotel at the Meadowlands, but turned out to be a real mess, as it was under renovation construction during the convention (though at least on Saturday--and I imagine Sunday--they were not actually doing construction). The result was that the Kaffeeklatches were held in regular hotel rooms instead of in the coffee shop or bad area, the Green Room was located in another regular hotel room (not a suite), and the whole place had open construction areas with wires and pipes exposed. In addition, the hotel took all the meeting rooms and changed their names (e.g. Churchill) to numbers only a couple of weeks before the convention (and after the preliminary program was sent out). Luckily the convention managed to get these changes into the Pocket Program and the program grid. (Someone had posted signs all around the hotel saying "Hotel d'Isaster" with various explanations, such as, "God created the world in six days, and on the seventh He said, 'Let someone else do the hotel.'")

Alas, there were other confusions as well. The hotel had a Lower Lobby, a Lobby, a 1st Floor, a 2nd floor, and so on. But the convention's map labeled the Lobby as "1st Floor" and the 1st Floor as "2nd Floor", and also did not show where the elevators were relative to the rooms (that is, they showed only one end of some of the floors, and the elevators were at the other end).

### **General Convention Comments**

What else? Well, registration sent me (as a program participant) to the Green Room to get my materials, but they sent me to Program Ops. Since I did not yet have a map, I made several wrong turns in the process. They did have name tents, and they were not too large to carry easily--but they were too small to read. The cards were about eight inches wide, with type so small that only the front row could read it. Luckily, I had brought a standard-sized tent from a previous convention with large lettering, and used that instead.

I saw only one newsletter when I was there, and it did not have anything about program changes, though at least one person scheduled to appear did not. (The fact that this was Barry Malzberg, and he was one of the main people I was interested in hearing did not help my attitude any, though that was not Lunacon's fault.)

As I said, I attended only my own items. In part this was because I had three items between noon and 6PM, but also because there was not much that I was interested in, and those few were opposite

panels I was on, or right before them.

I know this sounds like an unending series of complaints, but the fact is that there *\*were\** a lot of problems. There were, of course, some positive features. There was a freebie table, a message board, and a decent-sized con suite (on the eleventh floor, it was rather far away from everything, but did have a nice view of the Manhattan skyline). The Green Room had a clock, and someone had baked a lot of cookies, etc., which were designed for people with dietary restrictions (e.g., no wheat or gluten), and well-labeled with their ingredients. Other than these, the Con Suite had the same foods as the Green Room.

The Art Show was small, but good. (Making a small show large by adding mediocre art makes it worse, not better.) The Dealers Room was split, because the original larger room was not available due to construction. At least the two rooms were right across from each other, and there were a few book dealers among the non-book items. There was also a Dealers Row of rooms on the First Floor. Maybe I have reached a saturation point, but I did not buy anything, probably a convention first for me. (Others must have, because one book dealer said that by early Saturday afternoon he was in the black.)

I got Peter Heck to sign three of his "Mark Twain" mysteries (he has written six). Unfortunately, there are no plans for any more at this time.

**Alternate History Roundtable**  
**Saturday 12N**  
**Christopher Cevasco, Byron Connell (mod), Louis Epstein, Evelyn Leeper**

Description: "What are the latest trends in alternate histories? What's the relationship between history and alternate history?"

Estimated attendance: 25 people

I made a lot of notes for this--and then left them at home!

Vasco is the editor of PARADOX, a small-press magazine specializing in historical (and ahistorical) fiction, which I definitely recommend. He also writes secret history. (Quick note: "Alternate history" is history contrary to known facts; "secret history" is history that does not contradict known facts, but is nonetheless not the accepted version. For example, THE DA VINCI CODE is secret history [in my opinion].)

Jeffries described himself as a "Strict Reconstructionist" regarding the Confederacy, though what he meant by that is ambiguous (intentionally, I am sure).

The first two major trends noted are that series seem to have taken over the novel-length alternate history works, and that Harry Turtledove seems to be trying to corner that market, having not just series, but series of series.

Vasco said that while the novels are tending to become even longer, by being parts of series (or even parts of a single work published in multiple volumes), the trend for short alternate history fiction seems to be to make it as short as possible. He thinks this is due to the rise of the idea of "flash fiction" in general. I would add that Michael Swanwick had several alternate histories in his book THE PERIODIC TABLE, each story of which was about four to six paragraphs.

Another trend is that the mainstream no longer shuns alternate history, accepting such works as J. N.

THE CHILDREN'S WAR, Newt Gingrich's 1945 and his "Gettysburg" trilogy (co-authored with William R. Forstchen), Philip Roth's THE PLOT AGAINST AMERICA, and Kazuo Ishiguro's NEVER LET ME GO. Of course, mainstream authors and critics often act as though they had just invented alternate history (though there will be an occasional nod to MacKinlay Kantor's IF THE SOUTH HAD WON THE CIVIL WAR or even Winston Churchill's "If Lee Had Not Won the Battle of Gettysburg").

From the audience, J. J. Pierce said that most alternate histories these days seem to be about the wars themselves rather than the consequences of the wars turning out differently. And indeed many of these seem to be what I would categorize as "counterfactuals", an academic term used by historians for examining the "what if?" aspect of history. These tend to have no fictional characters, no dialogue, and lots of info-dump about historical, economic, and military matters.

Connelli noted that one reason that alternate history is getting notice in the mainstream (as well as one effect--there is a feedback loop) is that more of these counterfactuals are being published for the general public rather than just for historians.

One is also seeing more alternate histories based in literature, although in many cases the literary figures will be people like Hugo Gernsback rather than people like Oscar Wilde.

Someone asked about whether authors need to explain the divergence point. The answer seemed to be, usually not, though if it is obscure enough one must give some information. (This is where some of the stories in the first ALTERNATE GENERALS edited by Harry Turtledove had a problem--the introductions which explained the divergence points were omitted. This is not a problem if you are reading a story set in 1920 with a Confederate States of America, but when the divergence is that Sun Tzu helped the Persians against the Greeks (\*and" it uses a Greek transliteration for Sun Tzu instead of a modern English one!), a little hint would be useful.) Regarding this, Ellen Asher put in a strong word for the appendix (although if the reader does not encounter this until the book is finished, it is a watered-down blessing).

### **The Out-of-Print Hall of Fame Saturday 3PM**

**Russell J. Handelman, John Hertz (mod), Evelyn Leeper, John J. Pierce, Andy Porter**

Description: "What are the works we miss the most? What are the key stories and books that have remained forgotten (even in this print-on-demand age), and what can we do to remember them?"

Estimated attendance: 30 people

A few authors were mentioned--John Collier; E. R. R. Eddison; James Tiptree, Jr.; A. E. Van Vogt; Richard C. Wilson--but on the whole it was more a discussion of where to look than what (or whom) to look for. I had done some research ahead of time on a few authors that seem neglected to me. In particular, John Wyndham has only three books in print in the United States (THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS, THE MIDWICH CUCKOOS, and WEB). Charles Beaumont has no collections of short stories in print, only a relatively expensive volume of his "Twilight Zone" scripts. A. Merritt has only THE MOON POOL and THE METAL MONSTER. John Brunner has THE SHEEP LOOK UP, THE JAGGED ORBIT, and SHOCKWAVE RIDER--his classic STAND ON ZANZIBAR is out of print. In fact, there are seven Hugo-winning novels not in print:

- | Robert A. Heinlein's FARMER IN THE SKY
- | Mark Clifton & Frank Riley's THEY'D RATHER BE RIGHT
- | John Brunner's STAND ON ZANZIBAR

- | Vonda N. McIntyre's DREAMSNAKE
- | Lois McMaster Bujold's THE VOR GAME
- | Lois McMaster Bujold's BARRAYAR
- | Lois McMaster Bujold's MIRROR DANCE

And Clifford Simak's WAY STATION is available only in an expensive edition.

The first suggestion was to seek out the classic anthologies, which would include:

- | Isaac Asimov's "Great SF Stories" series
- | Terry Carr's "Best Science Fiction of the Year" series
- | Groff Conklin's anthologies
- | H. L. Gold's THE GALAXY READER OF SCIENCE FICTION
- | Raymond J. Healy & J. Francis McComas's ADVENTURES IN TIME AND SPACE
- | Judith Merril's "Year's Best SF" series
- | Robert Silverberg's THE SCIENCE FICTION HALL OF FAME I and Ben Bova's THE SCIENCE FICTION HALL OF FAME II (sometimes 2A and 2B)
- | William Sloane's STORIES FOR TOMORROW
- | Philip van Doren Stern's GREAT TALES OF FANTASY AND IMAGINATION, THE MIDNIGHT READER, and TRAVELERS IN TIME
- | Phil Stong's 25 MODERN STORIES OF MYSTERY AND IMAGINATION
- | Herbert A. Wise's GREAT TALES OF TERROR AND THE SUPERNATURAL
- | Donald A. Wollheim's "World's Best Science Fiction" series

Obviously most of these are not on the shelves of your local new bookstore. With public libraries doing more and more purging of older books, even the public library is not necessarily a good source. Used bookstores, library sales (ironic, isn't it?), and <http://www.bookfinder.com> (an aggregator of many on-line used book dealers) are the best places to try. (I mention library sales because for the last two years I have found some of these at the Bryn Mawr sale in Princeton for a dollar or two each in hardcover.)

Recent anthologies attempting to showcase the best of the past include several from David G. Hartwell such as THE ASCENT OF WONDER (with Kathryn Cramer), THE SCIENCE FICTION CENTURY, and THE WORLD TREASURY OF SCIENCE FICTION.

NESFA Press is bringing out single-author collections of the major authors of the field which are certainly a prime resource in finding older shorter works. Such print-on-demand publishers as Wildside Press and Tachyon Press are producing collections of current authors' shorter works (as well as some of classic authors). And every once in a while a major publisher will issue an anthology of early works, such as Ballantine Books did with Douglas A. Anderson's TALES BEFORE TOLKIEN.

The Science Fiction Book Club often issues omnibus editions of an author's earlier novels. For really old authors (i.e., those in the public domain), many of their works can be found on-line. (For example, all of Kipling's science-fictional works are available on-line.)

One factor working against some authors being reprinted is that either the ownership of the rights is unclear, or their heirs have an inflated idea of what the rights are worth. (Rarely is it the author who prices himself out of the market.)

**Evelyn Leeper, Robert Rosenberg, Joan Winston, Ben Yalow (mod)**

Description: "Is fandom dying? Is it healthier than ever? Why are the answers to these questions so much more complex than yes or no?"

Estimated attendance: 10 people

I gave my credentials as a fan: first convention thirty-six years ago, publisher of a weekly fanzine for the last twenty-eight years (and currently at issue #1327!), twelve Hugo nominations as fan writer.

Yalow said that fandom is healthy, but not as healthy as in the 1950s to 1970s. I pointed out that it is now spread more thinly over many venues, with specialty conventions for film, television, anime, gaming, and so on.

Yalow said that the idea of mystery conventions and other conventions spun off from science fiction conventions, but that some (e.g. media) conventions did not split off completely.

Someone quoted the old lament, "It's a proud and lonely thing to be a fan," noting that these days with films such as THE MATRIX and other blockbusters having huge followings, this is no longer true. Science fiction is now mainstream, meaning the need for conventions has diminished. Or as I noted, "Nothing fails like success."

(Some people say that there are now other ways of staying in touch besides conventions. The Internet does allow fans to stay in touch, but the wide range of venues serves to fractionate fandom. E.g., someone says she has switched to reading livejournal to keep up with all her friends, but not all of her friends are on livejournal. So the sense of staying connected is somewhat misleading.)

**Miscellaneous**

After this panel, we met several friends, including Dan Kimmel from Boston, and went to Aldo and Gianni's for dinner. This was the main reason we had come to Lunacon, as we do not get many chances to see Dan (we do not go to Arisia or Boskone; he does not go to Philcon or Readercon). After dinner we decided to head home, since the Masquerade had already started and we are not big party people--especially with an hour-long drive after the parties.

I just ran across a Sinclair Lewis quote which is interesting in the context of conventions: "When audience come to see us authors lecture, it is largely in the hope that we'll be funnier to look at than to read." If the author writes humor, this is true, but I think it is more that the audience hopes the author is more of whatever his writing is--funny, insightful, poetic, whatever.

We have gone to several Lunacon Saturdays over the years, in part because it was easy to combine with a trip to visit my parents on my father's birthday. Now that it is back in New Jersey, it is reasonable to drive up and back for one day. The problem is that every time we have gone, it did not seem to have much that appealed to us. (And looking at Friday's and Sunday's programming did not change this opinion.) One problem with a small convention attempting to appeal to everyone is that it gets stretched thin--by the time you try to have anime, art, costuming, film, gaming, literary, science, and television programming, you end up with only one or two items in each category at a time, and if a literary person is not interested in "Creation and Destruction in Tolkien" or a panel aimed at writers rather than readers, they have nothing else to choose from, even with a dozen tracks.

The smaller a convention is, the more it needs to focus (in my opinion, anyway). (I was told the attendance was about a thousand. It felt much smaller.) The downside is that as it focuses on certain

areas, people interested in other areas will stop coming, making it even smaller unless it finds a way to gather in the people interested in its new focus. I suspect that there are enough people in the New York area that would attend a more tightly focused Lunacon, but many of them need to have someplace accessible by public transit, and finding such places with acceptable room rates is a real problem.

Next year is the fiftieth anniversary of Lunacon--I hope they can manage to pull it together for that.

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