

**Philcon 2003**  
**A convention report by Evelyn C. Leeper**  
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Philcon 2003 was held December 12-14 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. We had not attended a Philcon since it was in King of Prussia, which was over twenty years ago. We had, however, attended Boskone diligently, missing only three times since 1969. But when Boskone moved back to Boston, the cost for that went up about 20% (I have the spreadsheet data). We also got hit with a massive snowstorm, and realized that this happened about one year out of every three. So we finally decided to switch to a closer convention in a (slightly) better time slot weatherwise. (The snowstorm the weekend before Philcon made us question whether it was better, but at least it's only a two-hour drive instead of a six- to eight-hour one.)

All this is by way of explaining why a lot of this convention report may be comparisons between the two conventions. For example, Boskone last year had about 1250 people. My badge number for Philcon was 1206, and we signed up about a month before the convention, but in actual fact, the attendance was estimated at around 800, about the size of a Framingham Boskone.

We left the house about 9:30 AM Friday, and stopped at the Atlantic Book Warehouse in Cherry Hill. Contrary to the name, it is really just a large bookstore with remainders and discounted new books. We found a couple of math and logic puzzle books, and a book called "Mystery Midrash" of Jewish-themed mystery stories. Then on to Philadelphia, arriving about noon. Philcon is in the same hotel as Millennium Philcon was, so we knew where to park. At \$23 a day, it sounds expensive, but compared to the \$34 a day in Boston it was a real bargain!

It was still early so we left our stuff in the car and walked around Philadelphia, something we used to do a couple of times a year, but had not done for over ten years now. I. Goldberg's was still there, though the military surplus which had been their entire stock then was relegated to the basement and the main floor was a standard outdoor-wear, L.L.Bean-type place. I found a very nice (new) surplus trench coat for \$18 in the basement. We then split a cheese steak for a quick lunch and walked west to Robin's Book Store on Chestnut. They are still selling some coverless books among their used books, a bit surprising since I thought the publishers were cracking down more, although admittedly the coverless books were fairly old.

Our main stop was Whodunit?, the mystery bookstore. Not surprisingly, the bulldog that graced the store many years ago is gone, and the Sherlockiana collection is smaller, but the rest was the same. (The owner said that Sherlock Holmes books tend to vanish into collections rather than get re-sold back to stores.) I have been helping a friend look for mysteries by Peter Dickinson, Ruth Rendell, and Jacqueline Tey, but we have clearly found all the ones that are even moderately available, and so I could not find any of the five dozen (!) books still on the list. I did buy Mike Ashley's "Mammoth Book of Egyptian Mysteries" (detective stories, not mysteries like how they built the pyramids). So similar to Boskone, we ended up acquiring books before getting to the convention.

We walked back to the car and got our luggage, then registered at the Marriott (\$81 a night versus \$129 a night in Boston) and then at the convention. Registration for the convention was very fast (at about 3:30 PM). This included a free book, PRINCE OF AYODHYA by Ashok K. Banker, which looked like a re-telling of the "Ramayana", but is only the first book of a seven-book series.

### Dealers Room

The Dealers Room was supposed to open at 4 PM Friday, but they postponed that to 5 PM, meaning we had only a half an hour in there before our dinner appointment. We did not get very far. We did buy three DVDs ("Son of Frankenstein"/"Ghost of Frankenstein", "Doomwatch", and "The Shrunken City") and two VCDs ("Godzilla Against MechaGodzilla" and "Tales of the Unusual", a sort of Japanese "Outer Limits"). The room is much larger than Boskone's, but it also has a much higher proportion of non-book tables, meaning probably about the same number of book tables.

### Art Show

The art show was in general not quite up to the standards of a Boskone art show, but the exhibit of Arthur Radebaugh paintings more than made up for any other lack. There was a whole article in "The New York Review of Science Fiction" in the May 2003 issue about a Radebaugh exhibit in Philadelphia in March titled "The Future We Were Promised". (There is an on-line version at <http://www.losthighways.org/radebaugh.html>.) I was also intrigued by Heidi Hooper's work, for which the medium is "dryer lint" (in various colors).

### Programming

There was no on-line schedule available before the convention. (Someone claimed there was a PDF, but if so, it was well hidden at 9 AM Friday before we left.) The panels seemed interesting enough from the descriptions, but were very sparsely attended, with most I attended ranging between 3 and 20 people in the audience. One problem was that there were fifteen different tracks during prime time (not counting autographing, art show, etc.)--way too many for an 800-person convention. (At Boskone 40, which was probably 50% larger, there were thirteen tracks, and panel attendance at the panels I went to was between 15 and 75 people, averaging around thirty.)

I know there are people who think that providing more panels is always better because it means there is more choice, but for panelists to come to a room and find an audience of five can be very off-putting, and the panel often suffers for it. In addition, one does not get the sort of audience participation that a larger group can provide. And while one can argue for giving as many people a chance to be panelists as possible, I will note that many panels ended up with only one or two people out of several selected. Now, some might say this would be true for fewer panels as well, but it's certainly possible that after the panelists saw the sorts of turn-outs they were getting, they just did not show up for subsequent ones. And it's possible that in order to fill out all these panels, the committee selected a lot of people who were either not sure they would attend, or unreliable, or a combination of these.

In any case, 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 will try to provide a rough estimate for most of what I attend. It is hard to be precise--people arrive late or leave early, and it is also hard to count exactly from the front row. I will also note what other panels looked interesting but that I had to skip.

**Danger, Michael Knight, Danger**  
**Friday 7:00pm**  
**Mark Wolverton (mod), Frank Wu**

Description: "From Lost in Space to Knight Rider to Star Wars, robot sidekicks have been a major part of science fiction in film and television. Why are robots and other forms of artificial intelligence so popular as the foils to humans?"

Estimated attendance: [I forgot to count]

Someone mentioned that he could not always recognize his own writing, and quoted Asimov as saying (when he was asked something about the "Foundation" series in the 1980s), "Just because I wrote them doesn't mean I know what's in them."

I will state my theory (which I mentioned during the hour) up-front: Genre fiction seems to have a tradition of a humorous sidekick, especially in film (hence the Nigel Bruce bumbler instead of an accurate Watson), but as we have become more aware of stereotypes, all the various ethnic types have become off-limits. Only in robots can one still have a humorous, pseudo-ethnic sidekick.

Wolverton began by saying he thought the robot sidekick served as a foil to humanity as a whole, and was used partly for humor and partly as an alien being (as Spock was). If robots are our superiors, he said, we may actually be the sidekicks. So seeing robot sidekicks allows us to feel superior instead of worrying about this.

Wu talked about science fiction as the "literature of the outsider"; since it is read by outsiders, outsiders are shown favorably.

Returning to the superiority issue, Wolverton asked, "Why \*did\* Data want to be human?" He also noted that studies show that the more humanoid a robot is, the more we like it--up to a point. If it starts to look too human (like the replicants in "Blade Runner"), then we start to distrust and dislike it. In terms of movies, he applied this to our attitudes towards Harryhausen's creations versus the computer creations in "Final Fantasy". We find Harryhausen's creations "more organic" and most people he has talked to prefer them to the rather cold, if more "realistic" computer animation of today's movies. (Admittedly, Gollum may change our attitudes toward computer animation, but it is still very hard to do a regular human face and make it look right.)

Asked to name the best robot sidekick, Wolverton said that Data was the best, but his favorite was either Robby the Robot from "Forbidden Planet" or the robot from "Lost in Space". Wu said the best was the Terminator, but admitted he was not a real sidekick, or as he put it, "Not more of a sidekick but a kick-you-in-the-side." Robby, he pointed out, has the Three Laws, while the Terminator does not. But while the Terminator may be the best, Wu's favorites are Huey, Dewey, and Louie from "Silent Running". (Mark Leeper noted that they are probably also the most realistic robots in movies.)

(I wonder if David in "A.I." could be considered the ultimate robot sidekick.)

From the audience, Mark Leeper said that there seemed to be two paradigms for the robot sidekick:

Stepin Fetchit or Rin Tin Tin. Wu said this was true--nowadays we have "not a boy and his dog, but a boy and his giant flying robot." (I guess K-9 from "Dr. Who" would definitely be in the Rin Tin Tin category as well.)

Someone in the audience expressed a rather strong feeling for "fembots with hinged faceplates."

I asked if the Golem would be considered a robot sidekick, and Wu said that golems were the products of the tech of their time. As an artist as well as a fan, Wu said he wants more science fiction with robots, aliens, and spaceships. Wolverton pointed out that authors often avoid these tropes because they are precisely what is ghetto-ized into science fiction, and writers are seeking credibility in the larger literary world. "I don't want credibility; I want fun," countered Wu, and someone in the audience shouted out that we need more "positive robot role models."

This led to a distinction between robots who destroy their makers and robot sidekicks. Wu reminded the audience that the crime in Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" is not Frankenstein's creation of the Creature, but his abandonment of the Creature after its birth. People listed various good versus bad robots (some of which must have been from television or anime, as I did not recognize them).

The panel closed with the suggestion, "Feed your inner robot."

I chose the previous panel over "Transformation of the Graphic Novel" ("Serious Literature or just 'comics?"). I had also planned to attend "80 Years of Weird Tales" ("The history and continuing development of The Unique Magazine") but ended up in the Con Suite in an interesting conversation about film, so decided to skip it.

### **Science Fiction and the Image of the Scientist**

**Saturday 10:00am**

**Bruce Balfour, Paul Levinson (mod), Eric Kotani (Yoji Kondo)**

Description: "Does the portrait of science and scientists in Science Fiction match reality? Does Science Fiction have a responsibility to educate the public about the ways of science?"

Estimated attendance: 20 people

Levinson began by observing that Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" is often considered the first modern science fiction novel, and then claiming that the Preface of that novel uses the word "scientist" for possibly the first time. This is an interesting claim, but it's not true--the word "scientist" does \*not\* appear in the Preface, or indeed anywhere in the book. Its first appearance in the English language appears to be in 1840, twenty-two years after the 1818 edition, and nine years after the 1831 edition.

Kotani added, the term in use before then was "natural philosopher". I wonder what the words in other languages are? (Somehow this got Kotani off on a tangent about how he entered "homo sapiens" on his census form for race and got a call from the Census Bureau saying there was no such race. It's off-topic, but interesting--if true.)

Kotani thought the image of the scientist in science fiction was not accurate, because in science fiction they are shown as being rational and reasonable, and they are not this way in real life.

Balfour said this was not entirely true, but often swung in the other direction, since the mad scientist is certainly more dramatic than any realistic portrayal. (Or most realistic portrayals, anyway.) There is more balance in books than in media, he added, but even there, whatever the problem in the book is, it will be solved by the end much more often than in reality. This is especially true of such authors

as Michael Crichton. (I will note that there are exceptions.)

Levinson said that in science fiction, one often sees scientists in conflict with religion, but in real life many scientists are religious. He mentioned Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit and a scientist, who unfortunately got involved with the Piltdown Man scandal. (de Chardin's scientific theories were a bit on the fringe. I think Gregor Mendel might be a better example.)

Levinson said there was also the "lone hero" image versus the reality of the large corporation. There are some films that show this corporate, collective aspect: "Gattaca", "Contact", "Dante's Peak", and "Brainstorm", among others. But even here, there is often a single scientist fighting the corporation rather than a team of equals working for a solution. (Of course, the lone scientist dates back to "Frankenstein", and is a far more romantic image. And one can argue that many of the great scientists of the past were lone wolves, and that the writers draw from that rather than from modern science.)

Someone in the audience complained that the line between fiction and reality is being further blurred by docudramas. Levinson said that this was not new--Xenophon and Plato gave differing accounts of the death of Socrates. (And the three synoptic Gospels differ in several key points as well.) Levinson said that he was first struck by the subtle ways docudramas can bend the truth was when he watched "Ike" and realized that he never remembered Eisenhower being that charismatic when he was speaking. And when he went back and re-watched some news footage of Eisenhower, he realized that Eisenhower was *\*not\** that charismatic when he was speaking. Kotani reminded us that makers of docudramas have to abstract and condense, and the best we can hope for is that they remain true to the core of the story they are telling.

In answer to my question, Levinson said that there was indeed a written parallel to docudramas, and that the writings of Plutarch, Pliny, and many others were basically docudramas in written form. Earlier readers knew not to trust them completely, but we have lost that critical sensibility (although clearly some of Pliny's "Natural History" is flat-out false).

Audience and panel members got into a bit of a discussion over the accuracy or lack thereof of "A Beautiful Mind", but pretty much everyone agreed that Oliver Stone's "JFK" was not accurate, and that this may have started the recent trend of inaccurate docudramas.

On the other hand, the commentaries and extra materials on DVDs do give today's audiences a better chance of finding out what has been changed for the movie (e.g., astronaut Jim Lovell's commentary for "Apollo 13").

Returning to the image of the scientist in science fiction, someone asked for good examples, suggested the scientist in James P. Hogan's "To Inherit the Stars". Balfour named Gregory Benford's "Timescape" and "Cosm". Another audience member recommended Mary Doria Russell's "The Sparrow". Non-fiction fares better, with Levinson suggesting Paul de Kruif's "The Microbe Hunters". Someone else called out "The Da Vinci Code" and "Angels and Demons", but these sound questionable to me.

Levinson said that another inaccuracy is that in fiction the scientist is usually portrayed as a generalist, or at least somewhat so (e.g., a "physicist", rather than a "plasma physicist"). Kotani said this was in large part because narrowing down the area of specialization usually resulted in the need for a large "infodump" to explain it. Also, one needs a broad range of sciences for most stories, and having one or two characters who can cover them all is more economical (and easier for the reader to follow) than having dozens. (When someone mentioned that a broad range of sciences is needed for a story, someone in the audience shouted out, "C.S.I.!!")

As far as inaccuracy, someone quoted Asimov as saying, "Never trick your reader," and someone

else said that lying to propagandize is counter-productive.

In general, there was too much about accuracy in general, and not enough about the psychology of the image from an artistic point of view for my tastes.

I chose the above over "Turning the Wheels of If" ("A discussion of likely change points for alternate realities, universes, and histories") and "Time Travel" (no description).

### **Athens vs. Sparta**

**Saturday 12:00n**

**Jeff Bredenberg, Stephen C. Fisher, Andre Lieven, Susan M. Shwartz (mod)**

Description: "Some societies pass on their values, and others just die out. Will our society speak to the future?"

Estimated attendance: 10 people

Shwartz saw this as a discussion of culture clash as well as of passing on one's culture, and said that the notion of culture clash has fascinated op-ed writers for a long time, going back at least as far as Thucydides. Shwartz also said she wanted to avoid having the panelists (or the audience) get into a discussion of current politics. (Good idea!) She did say that in spite of knowing what low status she would have had in Athens, she still would rather have been an Athenian than a Spartan.

Fisher disagreed with the implied premise (that Athens passed on its culture but that Sparta did not), saying both left a lasting impact. From the audience, Patrick Kelly later did say that the military culture of Sparta survived, and survives in the military to this day, most notably in training methods such as boot camp and drill. "Train hard, fight easy." (In general, the panelists agreed that the description they were given was confrontational and biased towards the pessimistic.)

Shwartz asked, "What do we know about Sparta?" Lieven responded, "They had a kick-ass military." Fisher added that they also lasted an amazingly long time (from about 715 B.C.E. to 222 B.C.E.). Shwartz said that all most people can remember about Sparta are the Cryptaea and Thermopylae. She said what people do not remember are things such as that when the Spartans defeated the Athenians after the Athenians had massacred the Spartan town of Melos, the Spartans did not retaliate against the Athenians.

Someone said that the Spartans were written about primarily by their enemies, leading me to think this discussion could be expanded to include other cultures in the same situations, such as the Vikings and the Aztecs. Is the problem losing, or is it just not having a literature that can survive?

In a brief tie-in to current affairs, Patrick Kelly (in the audience) noted that after their defeat, Spartans had to learn how to farm after having "outsourced" that job to slaves and conquered people for many hundred years.

Shwartz asked the more basic question, "How does a culture survive?" Of course, she observed, if a culture completely vanishes, how would we know it ever existed? I pointed out that there were probably such completely vanished cultures in sub-Saharan Africa, where the climate does not lend itself to leaving a lot of artifacts.

As a Canadian, Lieven was interested in the idea of culture class as it pertains to Canada and the United States, which he sees as diverging from each other. The philosophy of the United States, he said, is encapsulated in "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," while the corresponding motto

for Canada is "peace, order, and good government." The result is that Canada stresses far more geniality and civility of political discourse than the United States. (Well, it seems to me that they could not stress it less than we do.) There is in Canada, however, a lot of hand-wringing over cultural survival. (And of course, the First Nations of Canada are concerned that the various immigrant Canadian cultures will overcome them.)

Someone said that obviously to survive a culture must be transmitted to future generations. Cultures can survive even if their lands and artifacts are destroyed (e.g., Jews, Cajuns). In fact, just about the only artifacts "guaranteed" to survive a major global catastrophe are the lunar and Martian landers, and the Voyagers. However, it is interesting to see how artifact survival is handled in such works as Jack McDevitt's "Eternity Road", George R. Stewart's "Earth Abides", Woody Allen's film "Sleeper", and "Motel of the Mysteries". And landfills will preserve artifacts for a long time--in fact, middens are traditionally where archaeologists get much of their information. But our stuff will last longer--what will an archaeologist of thousands of years in the future make of compact discs?

Patrick Kelley said that Gutzon Borglum's Mount Rushmore would survive a \*long\* time, and that Borglum had also carved the text of several basic United States documents into the rock in a gallery beneath it. There was also supposed to be an "entablature"--a five-hundred-word essay carved to the right of Lincoln covering the history of the United States. This never happened--in fact the busts were even somewhat unfinished. I suspect the full-figure in-the-round statue of Crazy Horse on his horse would survive as well if they ever finish it. It is supposed to be 561 feet high and 641 long, the largest statue in the world, but currently, however, all that is complete after over fifty years is Crazy Horse's face.

Bredeburg claims that enough water has been dammed up or put in swimming pools, etc., above sea level to noticeably slow down the earth's rotation, and that this is a lasting legacy of sorts.

Shwartz closed by saying, "Lessons learned is not a bad legacy to leave behind you."

(One aspect of United States culture that could survive the United States itself might be the idea of a constitutional democracy, just as the notion of democracy outlasted Athens.)

I chose the above over "No Sci-Fi Here" ("The Boring Pretentious Panel for Stuck-Up Intellectuals refusing to dumb down Science Fiction") and "Forty Years of Doctor Who and Counting" ("A look back at one of the most successful series in television history, plus an overview of where the franchise is going now")

**Why Hasn't Lovecraft Spawned a Good Movie Yet?  
Saturday 1:00pm  
Bob Beideman, Joshua Bilmes, Ray Ridenour (mod)**

Description: (none given)

Estimated attendance: 10 people

Ridenour, sitting in the center, introduced the panel by referring to "these two August (Derleth) gentlemen on either side of me" (with "Derleth" in an undertone). He then asked Bilmes, the agent for the Lovecraft estate, "How many of your other clients have been dead all these years?" to which Bilmes responded, "Creatively?"

Ridenour said that one problem with adapting Lovecraft to film is that the books (or indeed, books in general) are not as linear as film. Another is that the atmosphere and background of Lovecraft's

stories accreted through the works gradually, and it is "tough to establish a backed-up creepiness." (Maybe this is also why Lovecraft is an acquired taste?) He did dispute the panel's title, saying that Roger Corman's "The Haunted Palace" (which while titled after a Poe story, was actually based on "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward") was a good movie that evoked the spirit and feel of Lovecraft.

Beideman said Lovecraft was best in his descriptive passages, not in his dialogue, and that Corman captured this in the visuals of "The Haunted Palace". But he said that there were other good direct adaptations as well, including two in "Rod Serling's Night Gallery" ("Pickman's Model" and "Cool Air"). (He later added a third, "Professor Peabody's Last Lecture".) There was also "The Re-Animator", which was based on "Herbert West, Re-Animator". Lovecraft himself did not think that story was very good, in that it appealed to the lowest common denominator of reader, and Beideman said the film worked at the same artistic level, so was in that sense as well faithful.

Bilmes said that most of the Lovecraft adaptations are done by B-movie talents such as Roger Corman, Stuart Gordon, and Samuel Arkoff. There are also "Lovecraftian" films--John Carpenter's "In the Mouth of Madness" is a good example of these. He said from a legal standpoint, it is difficult to overcome past mistakes made in signing away film rights, and so the rights to a lot of Lovecraft's works (and even more importantly, characters and mythos) have been signed away pretty much in perpetuity. So no one is willing to make a big-budget picture they will be sued over, although cheap independent films tend to operate below the radar of the lawyers. Ridenour said that ironically it is easier to do remakes than to revive unmade scripts. Bilmes described all this as "so many barnacles attached to the material" as to make it impossible to deal with.

I found myself wondering if Jeffrey's E. Barlough's Lovecraftian books--"Dark Sleeper" and "The House in the High Wood"--could be made into good movies. However, Bilmes said, "If you want to have a successful career as a horror writer starting in 2003, directly channeling Lovecraft is probably not your best plan." People read Lovecraft because he is Lovecraft, not for his inherent quality.

Ridenour thought that books such as the anthology "Shadows over Baker Street" were the way to go, combining Lovecraft with other genres (in this case, Sherlock Holmes).

Another problem is that the directors who could do a good job on Lovecraft have difficulty getting work. Beideman said that Ken Russell cannot get a contract because he is deemed too old by the completion guarantors; the same is true for Jesus Franco. (Russell is 76, Franco is 73. But both have done several films in the last few years, so Beideman's comments may apply only to big-budget films.)

Another good Lovecraftian film mentioned was "Cast a Deadly Spell", though its sequel, "Witch Hunt", was not as good.

In response to all the reasons about why new Lovecraft films were not being made, someone noted that the Sci-Fi Channel did recently make "Dagon", and someone else suggested that big money can overcome problems. (Though as noted before, big enough money can re-introduce them as people get greedier.)

Ridenour also said, "Some movies use the concepts but aren't his." Beideman said that inevitably, one must adapt, condense, and change the prose when making a movie. Lovecraft has "a very rich verbal style" which is difficult to translate to film. "How do you adapt 'The Outsider' without giving away the ending?" He would like to see either David Cronenberg or David Lynch make a Lovecraft film. Bilmes added Guillermo del Toro to the list, and Beideman agreed that his film "The Devil's Backbone" is in fact Lovecraftian.

An audience member, referring to the "rich verbal style", said that part of the appeal of Lovecraft



was the sound of his words, much as with Tolkien. Beideman said that in addition, many of his words (and ideas) have shown up elsewhere: the Necronomicon, the Old Ones, and so on. Ridenour described "The Blair Witch Project" as Lovecraft-inspired, and Beideman said, "'The Blair Witch Project' is the greatest Lovecraft story he never wrote." (Does this also apply to "The Last Broadcast", which was basically the same story as "The Blair Witch Project" but made a few years earlier?)

Asked to name some bad Lovecraft adaptations to support the panel's title, Beideman came up with "The Curse" (with Claude Akins). Other Lovecraft or Lovecraftian films of varying quality mentioned were "Cast a Deadly Spell" (me); "The Resurrected" (based on "Charles Dexter Ward") (with Chris Sarandon) (audience); "Dark Intruder" (Mark Leeper); "Die, Monster, Die" (audience); "The Dunwich Horror" (Beideman); "The Frighteners" (directed by Peter Jackson); "From Beyond" (Beideman); "The Gate" (audience); "The Keep" (based on the novel by F. Paul Wilson) (audience); "The Maze" (Ridenour); and "The Unnameable" (audience).

Ridenour said that Clive Barker is Lovecraftian, but that "Hellraiser" is just mean-spirited. Beideman said that people call "Alien" Lovecraftian, and that H. R. Giger is the best person to illustrate Lovecraft. And of course Giger's most famous art book is titled "Necronomicon"!

Bilmes claimed that one could almost trace all modern horror back to Lovecraft, either because writers claim him as an influence, or claim other writers as influences who in turn claim Lovecraft.

An audience member said that another science fiction work that was Lovecraftian was "Babylon 5: Thirdspace" and someone else suggested the entire "Spiders" arc in "Babylon 5" should be included as well.

Someone said he thought two stories that could be successfully adapted were "The Statement of Randolph Carter" and "The Silver Key", but that Peter Jackson should do them.

Of course, none of this covered radio or audio productions, perhaps a much better medium for Lovecraft. The audio adaptation of Stephen King's "The Mist" is absolutely Lovecraftian, and effective.

One can perhaps over-extend this. Beideman said that Darrell Schweitzer called "The Creature from the Black Lagoon" Lovecraftian, and Ridenour suggested that in that vein, one should also include "I Married a Monster from Outer Space."

(I think there are possibilities for a panel discussing the tropes of H. P. Lovecraft.)

I chose the previous panel over "Photons, Be Free!" ("In the Star Trek (r) universe, holograms have the capacity to achieve sentience. Does that mean they are entitled to the same rights as biological or robotic forms?").

**Why Conventional Publishers Miss Much of the Good Stuff**  
**Saturday 2:00pm**  
**Stephanie Burke, Shelly Morgan**

Description: "The Really eccentric books don't come out of mass-market anymore. What would a latter-day R. A. Lafferty do in today's Market?"

Estimated attendance: 10 people

This panel was "really\* bad, though to be fair it was not entirely Burke and Morgan's fault. Two other panelists were originally scheduled, but for some reason they did not show up. The problem was that Burke writes paranormal fiction, Morgan writes erotic fiction, and they are both published by the same small publisher. So the discussion was very slanted toward that publisher, and dealt more with specialized sub-genres, rather than the eccentric books that fit no sub-genre at all.

It's true that the response Burke and Morgan got from conventional publishers ("You don't fit our market") would apply to R. A. Lafferty, Howard Waldrop, or other "eccentric\* authors (by which I mean they write eccentric fiction, not that they are personally eccentric). Burke said she kept getting asked, "When are you going to write a real book?"

Interestingly, they said that it actually takes longer to get paid by a mainstream publisher than by at least their small-press publisher (in part because there is more red tape in mainstream and so it takes longer to get published). On-line book-selling means that it is easier to find small press, so the sales figures can be comparable.

Since this was not in actuality the panel I had hoped for, I left this early.

I chose the above over "The Weirdness Horizon" ("The incomprehensible future. At what point does the future become impossible to imagine?"). In retrospect, this was probably a mistake.

**Neglected Masterworks**  
**Saturday 3:00pm**  
**Grant Carrington, Robert Katz, Andrew Wheeler (mod)**

Description: "What works of Science Fiction and Fantasy did not find the audience they deserve?"

Estimated attendance: 10 people

(My summary, not surprisingly, is more a list of what was mentioned than a lot of discussion, but I've tried to retain the order of the chunks so that people can judge what is mentioned first, what suggestions may have triggered others, and so on.)

Wheeler began with the question, "Neglected by whom? Critics? Readers?" but their seemed to be pretty much agreement that the description at least meant readers.

Wheeler named several off the top of his head: Avram Davidson, E. R. Eddison, R. A. Lafferty, Mervyn Peake, and Olaf Stapledon. (The latter, by the way, is spelled "Stapledon", and \*not\* "Stapleton" as everyone on Usenet seems to want to spell it.)

Katz said he had just come from "Essential Masterworks of SF" (actually "You Don't Know Science Fiction [until you have read these classics]"), where the fact that most people tend not to read anything older than ten or fifteen years. (I know that people on Usenet refer to movies from the early 1980s as "There was this old movie....") In this sense, then, almost all the masterworks are neglected, but he particularly mentioned Edgar Rice Burroughs ("A Princess of Mars" and "Tarzan of the Apes"), R. M. Meluch ("Jerusalem Fire", "The Queen's Squadron", and "Sovereign"), Donald Kingsbury ("Courtship Rite"), A. E. Van Vogt ("Slan", "The Voyage of the Space Beagle", and "The Weapon Makers"), and Stanley Weinbaum ("The New Adam"). (I would probably dispute Meluch's books as "masterworks".)

Katz named Cordwainer Smith ("Norstrilia" and various short stories) and Doris Piserchia ("A Billion Days of Earth", "Earth in Twilight", "Mister Justice", and "The Flugger").

Carrington had Robert Coover's "Universal Baseball Association Inc.", Clifford D. Simak's "Way Station", and a lot of short stories: Gordon R. Dickson's "Black Charlie", James Gunn's "The Cave of Night", Michael Shaara's "The Book" and "Wainer", Robert Sheckley's "The Specialist", Clifford D. Simak's "Kindergarten", and Theodore Sturgeon's "A Saucer of Loneliness".

Wheeler asked whether Doc Smith was neglected, or for that matter, whether his "Galactic Patrol" could be considered a masterwork. Though it has been reprinted recently, its availability is in question. Katz noted that there used to be seventy-five "outlets" (bookstores selling new books? used books?) for science fiction in New York, he questioned how many there are now.

And while there are not very many reprint anthologies or collections that go back more than the previous year, NESFA and other publishers are working to bring a lot of this material back into print.

Returning to listing works, Katz added Alfred Bester, John Brunner ("Stand on Zanzibar" and "The Sheep Look Up"), Piers Anthony's early work ("Chthon" and "Macroscopic"), and the grandmother of them all, Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein".

Wheeler suggested Alexei Panshin's "Rite of Passage". Carrington thought Thomas M. Disch's "Camp Concentration" was a neglected masterwork.

One author not neglected seems to be Robert A. Heinlein. Wheeler said that Heinlein sells well in the Science Fiction Book Club, and that people there tend to buy the same sort of thing in classic books that they like in current books.

(From here on people were listing mostly one book at a time, but I'm going to make a single list for each panelists.)

Carrington listed Barry N. Malzberg's "Herovit's World". (I think that most of Malzberg's work is unfairly neglected.) He also listed Michael Bishop's short story "Death and Designation among the Asadi", Pat Frank's "Alas, Babylon", Keith Laumer, Edson McCann's "Preferred Risk", and Frederik Pohl's short story "Day Million".

Katz added Algis Budrys's "Rogue Moon", Glen Cook's "The Dragon Never Sleeps", Samuel R. Delany's "Dahlgren", Cecelia Holland's "Floating Worlds", R. A. Lafferty, Patricia McKillip, David Palmer's "Emergence" and "Threshold", and Robert Silverberg's "Dying Inside".

Wheeler named Poul Anderson, Fritz Leiber (many works, but particularly "The Big Time"), John Sladek's "Tik-Tok", George Turner's "Brainchild", and John Varley. He also listed Philip K. Dick, but can Dick really be said to be neglected these days?

Audience suggestions include James Blish's "Black Easter" and "A Case of Conscience", C. M. Kornbluth, Henry Kuttner and C. L. Moore's works, David J. Lake, Arthur Machen, Edgar Pangborn's "A Mirror for Observers", Alexei Panshin's "Villiers" series, Olaf Stapledon's "Odd John", Henry Treece ("Jason" and "The Green Man", which is supposedly based on "Hamlet"), Philip Wylie's "Gladiator", and Eric Thacker and Anthony Earnshaw's "Musrum". Katz added "VOR" to the Blish list. I should have mentioned John Wyndham, but did not. I did add Roger Zelazny's "Lord of Light" and "Creatures of Light and Darkness".

Towards the end, I think it is clear that while many of the authors and works named are fine, they are not what could be called "masterworks" in any meaningful sense.

There was just published an anthology "Tales Before Tolkien" (edited by Douglas A. Anderson) that probably has a lot of early fantasy masterworks, and one could also rely on books published in the original Ace Science Fiction Special series or the Ballantine Adult Fantasy Series, as well as any

older authors put out by NESFA Press. (I specify this because they also publish books by Boskone Guests of Honor and such, and while they are fine books, they are not the neglected masterworks we are talking about here.)

**Hugos, Nebulas, Howards, the Daedalus, the Coveted Balrog, etc.**

**Saturday 4:00pm**

**Ellen Asher, Roman Ranieri (mod), Gordon Van Gelder**

Description: "What do the awards actually mean?"

Estimated attendance: 2 people

Only two people, and I had to leave early on top of that!

Ranieri began by saying that most awards are meaningless or worthless because there is so much politicking involved. (He may be thinking particularly of SFWA's Nebula, as well as the Stoker, which is the award of the Horror Writers of America.)

Asher said that while there is some politics, there is also some merit. And the World Fantasy Awards are juried, which cuts down somewhat on the standard sort of politicking. Ranieri agreed, saying he prefers juried awards, and tends to respect them more.

Asher said that in popular awards (as opposed to juried awards), people nominate friends, but vote on merit. However, the "merit" may well be for some previous work that "should have won" before. (Consider some of the Academy Awards given out to older actors.)

Van Gelder disputed the "nominating friends" claim a bit, saying that if one looks at the final ballot, that is usually a better indication of quality than the actual award. ("It's an honor just to be nominated.") He also said that the current wisdom is that putting "Hugo winner" on a book cover does not sell more copies of the book (because readers have gotten wise to the fact that it's often that the author won for a short story many years ago rather than this book), but winning a Hugo does help in selling foreign rights. It may also help a lesser-known author.

[As I said, I had to leave early.]

I chose the previous panel over "Stem Cell Research" next door, which was much better attended--they kept coming in to borrow our unneeded chairs.

**Some of the Best Films You Have Never Seen**

**Saturday 6:00pm (90 min.)**

**Sue Braviak, Travis Crawford, Tony Finan, Joseph Gervasi, Jesse Nelson**

Description: "A look at some of the great and noteworthy films and video being released around the world. We will also be giving a brief lesson on the DVD zone system and the difference in the various video formats (PAL, NTSC, VCD) and what this means to the home viewer."

Estimated attendance: 30 people

This will be mostly a listing of films. Additional information on them can be found in the Internet Movie Database (<http://www.imdb.com>).

As noted in the description, most of the films are from outside the United States. There was a brief explanation of region coding on DVDs. Basically, there are eight regions:

1. U.S., Canada, U.S. Territories
2. Japan, Europe, South Africa, and Middle East (including Egypt)
3. Southeast Asia and East Asia (including Hong Kong)
4. Australia, New Zealand, Pacific Islands, Central America, Mexico, South America, and the Caribbean
5. Eastern Europe (Former Soviet Union), Indian subcontinent, Africa, North Korea, and Mongolia
6. China
7. Reserved
8. Special international venues (airplanes, cruise ships, etc.)

Technically there is no such thing as a region 0 disc or a region 0 player. There is such a thing as an all-region disc. There are also all-region players. (See <http://www.diabolikdvd.com> or elsewhere on line for these. How they handle the NTSC/PAL conversion is not clear to me, but Gervasi says that region-free players also perform the conversion from PAL to NTSC. In addition, Japan and the United Kingdom are both Region 2, but Japan uses NTSC, while the United Kingdom uses PAL, so there must be some way.) You can change the region on some players or PC software--on the software there is often a limit to the number of times you can do this.

And why is there all this stuff to worry about? Well, according to Braviak (and just about everyone else), Hollywood wants to keep its movies from showing up in overseas markets before it decides to market them there. Crawford added that Miramax also wants to block the importation of Hong Kong films for which they own the rights. Crawford claimed, "People have the right to see these films," but that seems like an odd "right" to claim.

However, there are also VCDs (video compact discs), which contain Windows AVI files. Almost all DVD players can play these, and they have no regional coding. However, the picture quality is on a par with VHS rather than DVD, they don't have the extras DVDs often have, and you can fit only an hour or so on each disc, meaning they are always split across discs. (They also may have other peculiarities. For example, the VCDs of some of the newer Godzilla films have Cantonese on the left track and English on the right, as well as "permanent" Chinese subtitles.)

Many films were recommended and clips shown, so I will probably just list them as best I can. (Sometimes the spelling was not clear from what I heard.)

Sue Braviak recommended "Hero" (a.k.a. "Ying xiong" with Jet Li, about the first emperor of China) and "Legend of Zu" (a.k.a. "Zu Warriors", a.k.a. "Shu shan zheng zhuan"),

Travis Crawford listed "Dead or Alive: Hanzaisha", "Female Convict Scorpion Jailhouse 41" (a.k.a. "Joshu sasori: Dai-41 zakkyo-bo"), "The Living Corpse" (I assume this is "Zinda Laash", a Dracula film from Pakistan from 1967, not to be confused with "Zinda Laash" from India in 1986), "Love Object" (the rare US film mentioned here); "Ping Pong" (Japanese, non-genre), "Shaolin Soccer" (a.k.a. "Siu lam yuk kau"), "Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance" (a.k.a. "Boksuneun nau geot", Korean), "2LBK" (?) (Japanese); the films of Alex de la Iglesia ("La Comunidad" [a.k.a. "Commonwealth"] and "800 balas" [a.k.a. "800 Bullets"]), and a whole slew of Russian fantasy films from the 1960s and 1970s, as well as a lot of Kino Video releases.

Another film Crawford mentioned was "Avalon", a Japanese film done by Mamoru Oshii (who also did "Ghost in the Shell"), shot in Poland, and has just been released on DVD. And there was also "Battle Royale" (a.k.a. "Batoru rowaiaru"), a Japanese film available on VCD, described as "kids on an island, last man standing" sort of film. It was not released in the United States partly out of a

concern over the violence, but also because the Japanese distributor wanted too much money.

Tony Finan named "Deeply, Deeply Trunk" (a thirteen-minute Argentinian film, so far as I can tell); "Evelyn, the Cutest Evil Dead Girl" (an eight-minute film that everyone seemed to like); "The Eye" (a.k.a. "Jian gui", by the Pang Brothers); "The Navigator: A Medieval Odyssey" (New Zealand); "The Returner" (a.k.a. "Ritaanaa", a Japanese time travel movie); "Sangre Eterna" (a.k.a. "Eternal Blood", Chile); "The Stone Tape" (a Nigel Kneale BBC production supposedly to be released by the BFI); and various BBC productions of M. R. James stories. The BBC also made "Ghost Watch", a mockumentary that people really did believe. (This sounds like "The Last Broadcast" or "The Blair Witch Project".)

Joseph Gervasi suggested "Cries and Whispers" and "Persona" (yes, the Bergman films), "Super Inframan" (a.k.a. "Jung-Gwok chiu-yan", Hong Kong, from the Shaw Brothers), and lots of films from Spain.

Jesse Nelson added "Convent of the Sacred Beasts" (supposedly a Japanese film available on a French DVD, but I couldn't find any reference to it anywhere) and "The Happiness of the Katakuris" (a.k.a. "Katakuri-ke no kofuku"). (The latter has been shown on either the Sundance Channel or the Independent Film Channel, as have some of the others.)

(I have my own list I would recommend: the films of Luis Bunuel, the films of Kyoshi Kurosawa, "So Far Away", "Bunuel and King Solomon's Table", and three new films that may actually get releases in the United States: "Cypher", "Nothing", and "A Problem with Fear".)

**I'm Sorry Mr. Poe, You Have to Change with the Times**  
**Saturday 8:00pm**  
**Leigh Grossman, Roman Ranieri (mod), Richard Stout**

Description: "Lovecraft, Wells, Poe, and other great writers of the past--if they were alive today what would they be writing?"

Estimated attendance: 5 people

Ranieri noted that in addition to their stylistic differences, all these writers were very "un-PC"--for example, Lovecraft was an anti-Semite.

Grossman said that many of these authors were writing for each other in some sense, and building on or responding to each other's works. Nowadays this impulse would probably end up channeled into fan fiction rather than professionally published works. (But he admitted that Lovecraft did not use other people's work or legends, but created his own mythology, so he could not rely an audience familiarity with his monsters.

Grossman also contended that writers have not changed much since "Will Shakespeare and Kit Marlowe hung out in bars."

Stout said that when he read Wells's "The New Accelerator", he realized it was only an idea, not a real story. But it does keep showing up, being used in "The Wild, Wild West" ("The Night of the Burning Diamond", 8 April 1966), "Star Trek" ("Wink of an Eye", 29 Nov 1968), and "The X-Files" ("Rush", 5 Dec 1999). This, I suppose, was supposed to indicate that Wells would be writing the same stuff, but for television. (Mark mentioned three others instances: "The Man and the Challenge" television series (1959-1960), "Twilight Zone" ("A Kind of Stopwatch", 18 Oct 1963), and "Infinite Worlds of H. G. Wells" (2001).)

Ranieri mentioned current writers Rick Hautala, Joe Lansdale, Alan Rogers and Chet Williamson as good horror writers. I guess he meant they were the modern-day equivalent of Poe and Lovecraft, but this seemed to be drifting somewhat afield. (Then again, the description for the panel was pretty vague.)

Grossman said that the problem with the horror market is that it tried to copy horror movies, but the movies were being aimed at fourteen-year-old boys who do not buy books. But he added, "Wells would be having Robert Sawyer's career right now."

Returning to Poe, Stout claimed that none of the pieces in Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue" fit--all are illogical. He said that Poe's "C. August Dupin" really stood for "See, I'm duping you." Grossman disagreed, saying that this conclusion assumes a hundred years of plot conventions and none of the conventions of the time. So Ranieri asked, "Are we talking about a Poe born into our world, or [one] yanked there?" This is my question precisely.

Ranieri reminded us that Poe was also a scathing critic. I asked, "Like Damon Knight?" to which Grossman responded, "Poe could have had Damon Knight's career." Wells, on the other hand, was more like Tom Clancy or Ian Fleming.

Grossman wrapped up by saying that writers go in and out of fashion. William Blake was forgotten until he was "revived" by T. S. Eliot, and Herman Melville took many years to become successful. Grossman also claimed that Henry James was the Danielle Steel of his day--what does that mean?! Maybe that he was read primarily by women, because Grossman also said that Charles Dickens was the first novelist that gentlemen would admit to reading. (By which he meant that lower-class men might have read earlier novelists, but not upper-class.)

Of course, these days, one is likely to find works by these classic authors "translated" into modern English, or at least the ones in public domain. Ptui!

**The Fringes of Science Fiction**  
**Saturday 9:00pm**  
**Gordon Van Gelder**

Description: "Exploring literature that is almost science fiction, but not quite--from slipstream to magic realism."

Estimated attendance: 20 people

Van Gelder did a great job with this, particularly since he was having voice problems \*and\* had to do the whole thing by himself.

Van Gelder gave a twenty-five-words-or-less definition of this category, usually called "slipstream", as "mainstream novels with science fictional elements or science fiction novels marketed as mainstream." (This can include fantasy as well as science fiction.) Richard Dorset and Bruce Sterling coined the term in the magazine "SF Eye".

However, he also quoted someone (Albert Camus?) as saying, "Whenever you can define a movement, it's over." And Van Gelder noted later, "Cyberpunk is pretty stale."

Someone asked what he would like to see next, and Van Gelder answered, "I can't say because then it wouldn't surprise me." Also, he added, "Steampunk worries me because it seems to be more nostalgic for science fiction than anything else." He seemed to think we needed more stories about

over-population.

Van Gelder often buys slipstream material for "The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction" (certainly more than Gardner Dozois does for "Asimov's" or Stanley Schmidt for "Analog"), with the result, apparently, that Dave Truesdale keeps harping on stuff in the magazine that is not fantasy or science fiction.

This definition is complicated by various subsidiary rules, such as, "Stories about science fiction or fandom are not science fiction if they come from the tradition of F. Scott Fitzgerald, but they are if they come from H. P. Lovecraft." And there is the question of whether magical realism and transrealism should be included in slipstream (though later Van Gelder did mention M. Rickert as an American magical realist.)

The United Kingdom does not have the same genre barriers that the United States does, so the notion of British slipstream authors is a bit more vague. Christopher Priest, for example, is both literary \*and\* steeped in genre traditions.

For that matter, Van Gelder pointed out that the whole mainstream/genre split can be traced back to the dispute between Henry James and Henry James about the purpose and techniques of literature.

Some obvious choices for slipstream authors are Paul Auster, Michael Bishop, Bruce Sterling, and Jack Womack.

Other writers and works mentioned include Iain Banks, James Finney Boylan (a.k.a. Jenny Finney Boylan), Kevin Brockmeier (whose stories appear in "The New Yorker"), Jonathan Carroll, Michael Chabon, Eric Garcia's "Anonymous Rex" series, Adam Johnson's "Parasites Like Us", Graham Joyce, Steven Millhauser, Christopher Moore (best known for "Lamb: The Gospel According to Biff"), Haruki Murakami, David Prill ("the next Lafferty"), George Saunders (whose stories appear in "The New Yorker"), and the film "Being John Malkovich". There is also Howard Waldrop, whom Van Gelder described as "in a class unto himself."

Someone mentioned Ted Mooney, but Van Gelder said, "You could call him slipstream but I just call him pretentious."

From the definition, I suppose "Memento" and "Space Cowboys" could be considered slipstream.

There were a lot of other authors and books named, but there is a little difficulty in writing them down as fast as they were mentioned, especially if I was unfamiliar with the author or title. (With more people on the panel, there is at least some response to each work's mention, which gives me a little more time to write it down, as well as some explanation of what their work is about.)

### **Technobabble vs. Techno-Documentation**

**Sunday 10:00am**

**Walter F. Cuirle, Glenn Hauman**

Description: "The difference between the way science is described in novels and manuals. How much is a fiction writer allowed to make up?"

Estimated attendance: 8 people

Hauman wrote (and writes) for "Star Trek"; Cuirle is a technical writer and a science teacher for the school for the House of Representatives pages. (He says this is particularly cool because it is taught



in the Library of Congress.)

Cuirle stated up front that there is the notion of "technobabble and Star Trek" (though most of it is better than "This Island Earth"'s "We call him Neutron because he's so positive."). But as he said of the science in science fiction in general, "It doesn't have to be right--it just has to be a good illusion." "Star Trek: Deep Space 9" and "Star Trek: The Next Generation" were good illusions, he said, but in "Star Trek: Voyager" the illusion broke.

Cuirle said that writers have to be more careful of biology than of physics because biology is better known. (But of course that has not stopped them from having interbreeding between alien races, or having an episode where evolution runs backward and people change "back" into spiders.)

Hauman talked about what William Goldman called "movie moments"--all those things which are unrealistic and inaccurate. For example, if the weather is important, the weather report will be on the radio when the character turns it on--no waiting until the "8s" (or whenever). There is always a parking space when a character needs one, everyone always has the exact change for the taxi (and has it out and ready, including the tip, even before the meter has finished turning over).

Hauman went on to say that the problem with "Star Trek: Voyager" was that it would not do what the fans wanted, and because of that, it showed disdain for the audience. I am not sure that makes sense--it is the job of the writer to create something that the audience will believe in (at least while it is going on) and be interested by. It is not the job of the writer to write according to some audience poll--this is not "American Idol". I am reminded of the show in Francois Truffaut's "Fahrenheit 451", where the character on the show on the wall turns to some audience member and asks, "What should I do now?" This "art" is contrasted with the art of literature--the art of literature relies on the author deciding what he wants to do and then convincing the reader of its "truth."

Hauman talked about some of the technical "bloopers" or inconsistencies in other films. For example, in "Star Wars", there is no logical reason for the light saber to terminate after three feet.

Cuirle said that what is important is a consistent illusion. He writes for "Analog" and the rules there are that a story must be upbeat, and you are allowed only one "bending" of the rules. So you can have time travel. However, Cuirle said that describing how to build a time machine would be a mistake.

Hauman said this is the "one-gimme" rule, and allows such scientific "impossibilities" as time travel, faster-than-light travel, teleportation, psionics, etc. Cuirle added the impervious hull of the ship in Larry Niven's "Neutron Star".

I put "impossibilities" in quotation marks, because the mention of these led the audience to debate the feasibility of the "Star Trek" transporter. (Receiverless teleportation would seem to be impossible, at least to me.)

Hauman said one of the problems with eliminating technobabble on television shows and movies are the constraints. There is a very strict time constraint, both overall, and for each "act". You also need to provide some visual spectacle, and dialogue can be difficult to memorize and deliver. Jodie Foster said that the dialogue with coordinates and other technical details was the hardest dialogue to learn in "Contact". What needs to be avoided is the rote memorization with no understanding--that is what Bela Lugosi did for "Dracula", and it does not sound at all natural. In "Star Trek: The Next Generation", LeVar Burton hated the technobabble, so he would speed up when he got to it. But then the scene would come up short in time, so the writers would add more....

Cuirle repeated that the television series writer has to work around the constraints of the 44-minute show with fixed commercial breaks. (True, but doesn't the book cover artist also have the constraints

of certain proportions, the need to leave space for the title and the UPC block, and so on. I guess my feeling is that part of the puzzle is working within the constraints. Conversely, if you do not want the constraints, choose another form.)

There was also technobabble in written science fiction, giving the example that H. G. Wells was allowed to invent cavorite. (John W. Campbell came up with all sorts of technobabble in the "Black Star" series. In fact, one could claim that the 1930s was the "Golden Age of Technobabble" in written science fiction.)

**Let's Get Time Travel Back into Fantasy Where It Belongs**  
**Sunday 11:00am**  
**John Ashmead III, Peter David, Leigh Grossman, Jack McDevitt**

Description: "Isn't time travel basically magic anyway? It was introduced to us in 'A Christmas Carol'. Doesn't it work as well, or better, in fantasy?"

Estimated attendance: 15 people

McDevitt started by saying that it is "next to impossible to write a time travel novel that remains believable for four hundred pages." (I guess my response is that authors should write shorter novels.)

Grossman said that his feeling is that science fiction is just a subset of fantasy--fantasy is not just high fantasy--while David said it really depended on execution. For example, the Edgar Rice Burroughs method of getting to Mars is fantasy, while a spaceship is science fiction. "The means define the end," he said. David also said that Werner Heisenberg is very certain in his uncertainty principle that matter transmission is impossible, in the same way that Einstein was certain that faster-than-light travel is impossible. (As Ashmead clarified, in special relativity, faster-than-light travel is equivalent to time travel.)

McDevitt said, however, that physicists now think that time travel and matter transmission (teleportation) are possible. The real problem with time travel stories is that nobody speaks English when you get there. (Authors often get around this by having the traveler be a scholar of ancient Greek, or Old Norse, but it is a kludge. Poul Anderson's "The Man Who Came Early" is a more honest approach.) Someone in the audience said that the matter transmission considered possible is single-particle only, and McDevitt conceded that was true.

Grossman pointed out that these days no one is doing time machine stories, even if they are doing time travel stories. (I do not think this is true, though certainly the time travel stories in the romance genre tend to use something closer to Twain's method rather than Wells's.)

At this point, Ashmead lamented, "We've reached the most depressing point a panel can reach--all the panelists are in accord." He reassured authors, however, that time travel was still an open question in science, so it is valid in science fiction as well as in fantasy.

Ashmead talked about Kage Baker's "Company" stories, which have time travel, but the travelers cannot change known history. (Baker somewhat begs the question of what constitutes "known history," at least in my opinion.) Later, Ashmead said that time travel that changes the past is fantasy, according to current science. David thought this might be like over-writing a file, where traces may still remain on the hard drive. Ashmead gave the example of Carter Scholz and Glenn Harcourt's "Palimpsests", and conceded that maybe time travel changing the past *\*is\** possible.

David noted that Wells's time machine travels through time, but not space, but that Asimov pointed

out that the earth is moving in space as well. This leads to some inconsistencies.

Ashmead asked what time travel is definitely fantasy. David listed Jack Finney's "Time and Again", which used (in David's words), "thinking \*really\* hard" as the time travel mechanism. Grossman thought Ray Bradbury's "A Sound of Thunder" was pure fantasy, and David listed Mark Twain's "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court" and "Behold the Man". Grossman added that most time travel romances are (as I noted earlier). Ashmead claimed that the problem with most time travel romances is that you do not have to read them--"once you've read the cover, you're done." Someone else suggested Tim Powers's "The Anubis Gates".

Someone in the audience mentioned that remote viewing and clairvoyance is now being studied, which led me to think that Charles Dickens's "A Christmas Carol" is an example of this rather than actual time travel. Ashmead said that even if it is being studied, "remote viewing is definitely down on the fantasy line."

McDevitt said that the proof that there is no time travel is that if there were, there would have been huge crowds at Ford's Theatre. Ashmead said that there seems to be some agreement (among whom?) that there cannot be time travel to a time before the machine was built. Grossman mentioned R. A. Lafferty's "Thus We Frustrate Charlemagne" as an example of time travel paradoxes. (It is similar to William Tenn's "The Brooklyn Project." As proof that my hearing cannot always be trusted, I transcribed what I heard as "Thus We Frustrate Charlie Main".) Ashmead chimed in, "You should really go back to hear my talk yesterday."

McDevitt introduced the idea that the past has a real existence, but Ashmead said that this is refuted by special relativity, and also that the notion is "now" is not universally defined. David gave the analogy of watching a baseball game from the bleachers--you see the ball hit well before you hear the crack of the bat. "We use time-traveling light every night when we look at the stars," he added. Ashmead also said that there is a "block universe view" in which all time--past, present, and future--is present simultaneously.

(At this point, the panelists descended in what I could only note down as "techno-babble".)

Lest anyone think that all this is entirely theoretical, Ashmead observed that satellites need to correct for general relativity because they are moving faster than the ground stations. David said there is also "subjective time"--doing something you like seems to take less time than something you do not, and time also seems to slow down during car accidents and such. Ashmead said that this is due in part to the amount of adrenaline released into your system in times of stress.

David claimed we could have time travelers who have managed to conceal themselves. Grossman was skeptical, saying that no one has yet used time travel for sex, spam, or advertising, and if time travel existed, they would have.

Fictionally, of course, they have. Ashmead cited Robert Silverberg's "Up the Line", and Robert A. Heinlein's "All You Zombies" may be the ultimate example.

David suggested that one could read "A Christmas Carol" as science fiction with Ebenezer Scrooge as a mutant with time travel and remote viewing powers). Ashmead thought one might even get an entire panel out of this idea of perverse interpretations of classic stories.

Someone in the audience proposed a sort of anthropomorphic idea that the universe somehow prevents changing key moments, but this led Grossman and McDevitt to ask, "What are the key moments and who decides?"

McDevitt reiterated that he did not go along with the idea the past as a real place, that "there is a

place where we are all one year younger." This led Ashmead to ask, "Does the past exist?"

David concluded by saying, "Perception shapes reality."

**The Anthology I've Always Wanted to Edit**  
**Sunday 12:00n**  
**Gardner Dozois, Roman Ranieri**

Description: [none given]

Estimated attendance: 8 people

This was half the size of the planned panel. Ranieri contributed his share, but Dozois deserves credit for being able to carry the bulk of the burden on the basis of his long experience.

The first thing Dozois said about the anthology he always wanted to edit was that it would be a non-themed anthology. The problems with themed anthologies are many. The first is that they are generally "high-concept" (e.g., "vampires fight Nazis"), and hence far too narrow. They are often characterized by having a title before they have anything else. Dozois said that a themed anthology with a theme of space exploration, for example, would probably be okay. (I mentioned Keith Laumer's anthology, "Dangerous Vegetables", and somehow this generated the catch-phrase of the panel: "the Artichoke Anthology".)

Dozois noted, however, that the last attempt at a non-reprint, non-themed anthology was "Starlight", which struggled through five volumes to critical praise but less than stellar financial success.

Dozois felt, however, that a themed anthology was tolerable with a reprint anthology.

Ranieri said that he wanted to do four horror anthologies themed around water, air, earth, and fire, and even wanted to call the first "H<sub>2</sub>ORRORS". But for a horror anthology, his publisher said, he had to guarantee at least one of Stephen King, Clive Barker, or Dean R. Koontz.

Dozois said that another problem with themed anthologies is that there are time constraints that preclude any real selection or editing. Compound this with the fact that many editors consider soliciting a story as a promise to buy, and one should not be surprised to discover that the quality of many of these stories is low. (This in turn devalues the entire field to people whose first experience with science fiction is one of these themed anthologies, so the damage is greater than just to one book.) And as someone pointed out, if the editor tells the publisher that he is going to have big-name author X, he has definitely committed to buying what author X sends him.

Dozois noted that this is how Roger Elwood destroyed the market for anthologies in the 1970s--he published a lot of low-quality stories, and he promised authors he could not always deliver.

There are definitely over-used themes, according to Dozois, and they are the easiest to grasp: dinosaurs, cats, war. (Someone suggested that the ultimate anthology would be "Cats Versus Dinosaurs".) "Persecution of scientists by the religious establishment" is not a theme that lends itself to a sound bite. Occasionally one will find a themed reprint anthology such as "Clones", but with reprints the time-dependency is not as much a problem.

(Another example of themed reprint anthologies would be the "Beginnings" trilogy: "Horrible Beginnings", "Magical Beginnings", and "Wondrous Beginnings". It probably means something that even anthologies come in trilogies these days.)

Successful anthologies often try for the "cachet of authority" (e.g., "Year's Best"). Or they try for a gimmick. "The Future in Question" consists of stories with a question mark in the title. Mike Resnick edited two, one of female authors writing stories with male protagonists ("Women Writing as Men") and one with male authors writing stories with female protagonists ("Women Writing as Men"). (Overlooking the fact that these titles sound more like stories written under cross-gender pseudonyms, my response was pretty much, "So what?")

Retrospectives are another kind of anthology currently in favor, and Dozois has edited several, including "Modern Classics of Science Fiction", "The Good Old Stuff" and "The Good New Stuff". David Hartwell has also done several: "The Ascent of Wonder", "The Dark Descent", "Foundations of Fear", and "The Hard SF Renaissance".

Ranieri asked the obligatory question for an anthology panel: what is the story with Harlan Ellison's "Last Dangerous Visions"? Dozois said that his theory was that it just got too big and cumbersome because Ellison kept buying stories for decades. As an example of how long it has been in progress, Dozois pointed out that George Alec Effinger sold his first story to "Last Dangerous Visions"--in 1970.

Speaking of his "Year's Best" anthologies, Dozois said he limits the number of stories he will use from "Asimov's", but it is sometimes difficult to find more "core science fiction" since there are few other outlets, and most of what is on the web is not "core".

There is also the regional anthology. David Hartwell has co-edited anthologies of Canadian and Australian science fiction, and there are other examples, such as "A Very Large Array" (New Mexico authors) and "Lone Star Universe" (guess!). But these are risky--Mike Resnick's "Under African Skies" and "Under South American Skies" are the worst-selling of his anthologies. (It figures--they are the ones I like the best. I later mentioned that in the Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling anthologies of the year's best horror and fantasy, I think Windling does a terrific job in selecting the fantasy, and Dozois said that when he uses those volumes in writers' workshops, the participants are confused by the fantasy stories.)

According to Dozois, Martin H. Greenberg sells the book to a publisher, but his co-editor provides the editing sensibility.

Ranieri noted that the erotic horror anthology "Hot Blood" "really stunk", and Dozois said that erotic horror sells in inverse proportion to literary quality. (I hereby name this "Dozois's Law of Erotic Horror".)

There are also shared-world (share-cropper) anthologies, where everyone writes stories set in the universe of a single well-known writer. (Very rarely, the contributors jointly create a world, or the editor creates a new world for the authors to work with.)

Similar to these are tribute anthologies (e.g., "Lord of the Fantastic" [tribute to Roger Zelazny], "Foundation's Friends" [Isaac Asimov]). The problem, of course, is that these pretty much have a ceiling on sales, which is that of the market for the author being honored, and will probably sell considerably fewer.

I can come up with a few ideas for themed anthologies: writers whose first name is "Steven", metallic writers (H. L. Gold, Robert Silverberg, etc.).

**Prejudices We Haven't Thought of Yet  
Sunday 1:00pm**

**Walter F. Cuirle (mod), Gordon Linzner, Nancy Jane Moore, Mark Ventrella**

Description: "Slavery, child sacrifice, and other things that weren't frowned on in their day. What about our society will be unacceptable in the future?"

Estimated attendance: 8 people

Ventrella's background was as a lawyer specializing in discrimination, which mean he could talk about the current situation, and also about the general trends, at least in the United States.

Cuirle said that the primary argument about what constituted unfair discrimination seemed to be categories: what people choose to be versus inborn traits. (This seems to ignore religion, which is certainly in the first category--or we would not have missionaries--but is not considered by most people in most cases something that we should discriminate on the basis of. On the other hand, the religion issue may be one of belief versus action, another dichotomy.) Cuirle also suggested the panel talk about prejudices "we wish people had," leading Ventrella to say, "Sometimes we're so open-minded [that] we're wrong." Ventrella suggested that we should have a prejudice against non-scientific thinking.

Moore responded, "You can be a perfectly good Christian without believing nonsense." She was referring to creationism, but I doubt her statement could be expanded to include other things that many see as "nonsense," such as resurrection or even the existence of God.

Linzner pointed out that we have to have some prejudices to function, and Ventrella gave an example of prejudices about restaurants. This indicated to me a need for the panel to define "prejudice", because it seemed as though it was being applied to any judgment, whether it had any basis in fact or knowledge, or not. Eventually, an audience member suggested that prejudice was a belief or value based on a lack of knowledge about a subject, which unfortunately is either a trivial definition or a false one. Part of the problem, of course, is that someone may believe that he or she has enough knowledge to make a valid judgment, while other people see this judgment as a prejudice. (Someone gave the example of our prejudice against dying, pointing out that in Philip Jose Farmer's "Riverworld" this turns out to be an unreasonable prejudice.)

One thing that does seem to be true is that old prejudices are replaced by new ones. In 1948, 90% of Americans were opposed to interracial marriage. That figure is much lower today, but something like 60% are opposed to same-sex marriages. (One can argue that the latter weren't even on the table as an issue in 1948, of course.) What is also true is that a higher percentage of older people are opposed than younger people. In fact, a majority of people 18-29 years old are in favor. So this would appear to be a prejudice that is going away.

(There is a great exchange in John Sayles's "Lone Star" which a white man talks about how he is in love with a black woman. His friend asks how her family feels about it, and he answers that they had been worried the woman was a lesbian, so they were pleased she wasn't. "Yeah, it's always heart-warming to see a prejudice defeated by a deeper prejudice," the friend responds.)

The good news is that we no longer view everyone other than "our kind" as expendable, a prejudice that directed much of the exploration and colonization efforts of the past (dating back to pre-historic times, of course). Cuirle suggested this might be carried further to a prejudice against standing armies, but Moore said that much of this depended on just how aggressive homo sapiens are, and how much is cultural versus how much is built in.

Cuirle thought that another prejudice of our times that might disappear was the prejudice against people who use mood-altering drugs or who see a psychiatrist. (I suppose this is replaced by the new prejudice against people who use tobacco.) Someone suggested this "improved perception" might

extend to other illnesses such as diabetes.

Ventrella wanted to make the distinction between prejudice and legal prejudice, and ask the more specific question of whether legal prejudice will exist in the future, or perhaps what legal prejudices will exist in the future. (This makes the question even more United-States-specific than it was before.)

I asked whether a new prejudice to be revealed might be a prejudice against non-human sentient beings. Ventrella added, "If we meet any," to which I responded, "Like chimpanzees, whales, ...?"

Moore extended this to genetic prejudices (such as in "Gattaca"). Someone in the audience extended this to artificial intelligence (presumably non-carbon-based sentience, though he could also have meant artificial enhancement of human intelligence, such as was done in "Flowers for Algernon").

Cuirle said that one thing which confuses the issue of prejudice is that political opinions sometimes get interpreted or painted as prejudices. (Well, one can argue that sometimes they are--how else to describe the political opinions of the Nazis or of the Pol Pot?)

Someone in the audience mentioned Ted Chiang's great story on "lookism", "Liking What You See: A Documentary". (Well, all Ted Chiang stories are great.)

Linzner got back to the dichotomy suggested at the beginning, expressing it as things we can change and things we can't. But then, he said, prejudice against blondes could be fought by wearing a wig, so it is then a choice to remain blonde and so the argument claims it is okay to have this prejudice.

Someone in the audience suggested that there seemed to be a rise in prejudice against intelligence (though it seems to me that one sees this recurring throughout history--never with good effect).

(It seemed as though almost a fair amount of time was spent talking about new prejudices rather than old ones that would go away. That's inevitable, so if this panel idea is reused, the description should be expanded to include that.)

I would have liked to go to "Gay Eye for the Straight Publisher" and "The Evolution of Robots in Science Fiction", but the fact that it was snowing suggested we should leave a little earlier than planned so we could get home before dark.

### **Miscellaneous**

The Con Suite was fairly minimal. For example, there was hot water and instant coffee rather than brewed coffee. The munchies were okay, but not a lot of healthy stuff like veggies, and they seemed to be out of sync, with dip when there were no potato chips, and chips when there was no dip.

Having the Reading Terminal Market nearby was fine for breakfast Saturday, but for Sunday the choices were so limited, we ended up picking up bowls of instant noodles Saturday night and using the coffee maker to boil water for them. Having Chinatown nearby (about three blocks away, two of which were through a mall) was really nice: we ate at Joe's Peking Duck House Friday night and at Rangoon Saturday.

Costwise, Philcon is definitely cheaper than Boskone. Boskone last year cost us \$469.52 for hotel (two-thirds of a triple room), food, and transportation. Philcon cost us \$356.37, and that included paying for the entire double room.

Panel suggestions for future conventions include "The Tropes of H. P. Lovecraft", and perverse interpretations of classic stories (e.g., "A Christmas Carol" as science fiction with Ebenezer Scrooge as a mutant with time travel and remote viewing powers).

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