Philcon 2010
A convention report by Evelyn C. Leeper
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[I have gotten several years behind in my Philcon reports and rather than give up altogether, I have decided to transcribe my notes without turning them into real sentences, paragraphs, etc. Maybe someday I will flesh them out, but I would not bet on it. At any rate, this report got done in only a few hours. And as they say, "The perfect is the enemy of the good."]

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Classic SF Movie and TV Tropes Done Right!
Friday, 5:00 PM
Christopher Stout, Christopher Garland, Jim Rosen

Description: "Anyone who's been to TVTopes.com knows them... the story and character elements that are used, over and over, as shorthand in TV and film. Things like the Evil Empire, the Noble Warrior Aliens, and the Badass Longcoat (or Browncoat, as the case may be), have all been in multiple movies and shows, and have often been a sign of something hackneyed and trite. But what about those times when they're used RIGHT?"

Estimated attendance: 12 people

Stout is working on a movie tentatively titled *Recursion* having to do with time travel, etc. You need the tropes to distinguish it: flashing lights, lens flares, whirlygig time machine, but you have to find a balance of the familiar and the non-stereotype.

Someone in the audience suggested that "tropes are like a handhold." Stout agreed: "You see the fedora, and rain, and shadows, you're watching a noir. You can also have a lot of fun playing against it." He gave *Brick* (a high school film noir) as an example. But where is the line drawn between trope and stereotype or cliché?

What you need is archetypal satisfaction. There have been archetypal expectations, especially since 1977. Archetypes can turn into tropes, and then into stereotypes, which become derivative.

Someone in the audience suggested that the tropes in *Planet of the Apes* made it seem to be one sort of science fiction, but really was another. Another said, "The ending was sheer Rod Serling." And yet another added, "Rod Serling was the master of playing against the trope."

is predictability a necessary result of using tropes? For that matter, Mark Leeper asked, what is a trope? Stout said that we have Jungian archetypes and stories. (Only two stories: A man goes to town, or a man leaves town.)

Smaller subsets of characteristics of a genre are tropes. Film noir is the classic example. More shadows, crime, the vixen, the hard-boiled detective.

Something you can identify as belonging to a particular genre. Something that has become a cultural meme.

But they can become clichés.

The writer has to put something new in it [e.g., Jesse Stone's drinking].

Audience: Spielberg could take the serials which had been done to death and in IJ made it seem new and fresh.

Stout: artists used to reference literature, but now they reference film and television.

Audience: seeing all the tropes in one film is a problem, especially in horror movies

Audience: the important thing is originality [but doesn't this contradict the idea of the trope]

Audience: likes when they migrate a trope from one genre to another (captain in Firefly) [but Firefly really was a Western]

Star Trek went on the air when Westerns were enormously popular. At the same time, The Wild Wild West (and The Man from U.N.C.L.E.) was cashing in on James Bond.

[not really much about tropes]

Audience: Hollywood wants everything made to fit expectations, to be predictable. Filmmakers are lazy, studios are timid.

"That's a movie I'm really waiting not to see." (remake of *The Wizard of Oz*)

Stout: James Bond films

Audience: Claimed the men wanted to be James Bond and the women in the audience wanted to be with James Bond. No, the men *thought* the women wanted to be with James Bond.

Stout: action, detective thrillers, spy movies

Me: one-liners, gimmicks, stupid women's names, self-intro, martini

In *The Dark Knight* Christopher Nolan took the tropes of action noir thriller and recast them as Batman.

Rosen showed up and hijacked the panel to talk about *The Invaders*, about which he has written a book.

The Future of Libraries and Bookstores

Friday, 8:00 PM
Tom Purdom (mod), Philippa Ballantine, Dina Leacock, Neal Levin, Barbara Barnett

Description: "Will the future visitor to the library or bookstore be someone carrying his or her e-reader into a nook or cranny?"

Estimated attendance: 25 people

- Barnett: Will be studying library science
- Levin: Tech service librarian
- Levin: Libraries haven't changed in ages, but now there is massive change
- Levin: Libraries are providing Kindles to members because it's cost-effective: buy 5000 Kindles, but only one of each book (on Nooks and Kindles, up to six copies are allowed per book). Loaning is allowed with the Kindle, but not with the Nook.
- Levin: "I really prefer to have a book to hold, but I don't object to being published on-line."
- Levin: "Fifty Things to Do with a Book Now That Reading Is Dead"
- Purdom: "So Amazon is making money and the writers aren't."
- Ballantine: Also being done in New Zealand
- Levin: How do they track circulation?
- Audience: described Overdrive
- Levin: Do you go to the library for this?
- Levin: Kindle more popular because it makes people come into libraries
- Audience: Becoming a "third space"--not home, but not work
- Levin: Libraries want people to come in
- Purdom: Decreasing visibility of reading
- Purdom: Will this affect whether people will read for pleasure?
- Barnett: Browsing technology is still not very good
- Levin: The avid son reads on-line, the non-avid one reads books.
- Purdom: Doesn't like to read sitting up [at a computer]
- Purdom: You also don't see books lying around
- Levin: Schools like them--no heavy book bags, easy to change textbooks, etc.
- Audience: Serendipity in bookstores and libraries suggests semi-randomizing
- [Me: That is how my library is arranged. :-)]
- Audience: Must support B&M stores if you want to browse there
- Audience: How does a Kindle handle non-fiction (graphs, pictures, index)?
- Audience: Not very well
- Purdom: Flipping back and forth is not easy, footnotes are done as hyperlinks, and the pictures are only in black and white except on an iPad
- Ballantine: Animated Alice
- Audience: Works in Library of Congress
- [Me: Need to distinguish among public, academic, and reference libraries]
- LoC Librarian: Some books exist only in forms that are not unreadable
- LoC Librarian: Also need to work at acquiring all these new ebooks; a new rule requires a different ISBN for each format
- Audience: Will formats merge?
- Levin: Trying to enforce ".epub" as a standard format
- Purdom: What is the function of the bookstore? Why go to Amazon instead of directly to the publisher?
- Audience: Single point of contact
- Audience: DRM makes things obsolete
- Audience: O'Reilly, iTunes lets you re-download
- Purdom/Levin: Baen's various experiments
- Audience: Time-sensitive pricing, but rights don't revert to author.
- Purdom: Tasini ruling said that if electronic rights were not mentioned, the author retains them
- Audience: Re virtual bookstore: "I guess it's like going into a virtual brothel."

- Audience: Is it true the computer is replacing the libraries?
- Purdom: Barnes & Noble is becoming more of a social center
- Purdom: Sheila Williams and *Asimov's* added 10,000 Kindle readers to their 18,000 base
- Purdom: Is reading an ebook different from reading a regular book?
- Barnett: No
- Levin: Yes, after six months
- [Me: I like flexing the book, etc.]

The Roots of Steam Punk: Victorian Science Fiction
Friday, 9:00 PM
Richard Stout (mod), Philippa Ballantine, Gil Cnaan, Tee Morris

Description: "Giant killer zeppelins! Death rays! Clanking inventions! Exploring the science fiction about H. G. Wells and his contemporaries."

Estimated attendance: 25 people

- This is about science fiction with Wells in it, *not* Victorian science fiction.
- Morris: "Secret Adventures of Jules Verne"
- Stout: "Jules Verne was forward-looking; steampunk is backward-looking."
- Cnaan: Retro-future, yesterday's tomorrow
- Cnaan: First would be "Gormenghast" trilogy
- Morris: Have to explain steampunk.
- Morris: "The Wild Wild West" is early example; *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* is steampunk for kids
- Stout: *The Time Machine* prop
- Morris: *Time After Time* prop
- Morris: "In my day, I was a monster. Now I'm an amateur."
- "The Wild Wild West" episode "Night of the Burning Diamond" is based on H. G. Wells's "The New Accelerator"
- Audience: The world of steampunk is intelligible, individual action is effective, and it looks cool.
- Morris: Stross thinks there is too much steampunk, we're glossing over it, and it's lost its roots in colonialism, etc. I.e., it's becoming too glitzy.
- Stout: H. G. Wells, Jules Verne, Mary Shelley are good reads and look real cool
- Ballantine: *Girl Genius*, *Soulless*
- Cnaan: China Miéville
- Stout: "The Mummy" (written in 1828, takes place in the 22nd century)
- Stout: "Adventures of Brisco County, Jr."
- Stout: "Steampunk has to be fun. It also has to be somewhat dashing."
- Stout: Distinct style
- Audience (Sue): Any thoughts on actual Victorian science fiction?
- Cnaan: A year ago, steampunk was only Victorian England. There was a suggestion to add the diesel era, etc.
- Cnaan: There is an Anglo-centric feel to science fiction.
- Audience: 1836 dirigibles in science fiction story
- Stout: Edgar Allan Poe's "Balloon Hoax" was later (1844)
- Morris: Steampunk is fine if written by a Brit, but they look askance at a Kiwi and an American
- Morris: Wikipedia says that William Gibson and Bruce Sterling's *The Difference Engine* was the origin
- Stout: Jeffrey Ford's *The Physiognomy* (the "Well-Built City" trilogy)

- Cnaan: People like the Victorian Era as a backdrop, but not necessarily the literature of it as an inspiration
- Stout: Birth of the Industrial Age
- Ballantine: Would take Sherlock Holmes as an inspiration
- Morris: "What a magical time!"
- Stout: Last era of the individual scientist et al rather than "just a cog in a machine."
- [Me: George Mann]
- Cnaan: Basically science fiction is not defined yet

The Fantasy and Science Fiction of Mark Twain
Saturday, 10:00 AM
Richard Stout (mod), Keith DeCandido, Peter Prellwitz, Evelyn C. Leeper

Description: "Exploring the fantastic work of America's great writer from the pioneering time travel of The Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court to the philosophical fantasy of his later work."

Estimated attendance: 20 people

These works include:
- *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*
- "The Private Diaries of Adam and Eve"
- *Letters from the Earth*
- Tales of Wonder (2003, The Science Fiction of Mark Twain (1984))
- "Whimsical Wonders" (1862-1875):
    - "Petrified Man" (1862): humorous, echoes in story about film of Mickey Mouse or Motel of the Mysteries
    - "Earthquake Almanac" (1865): literary hoax and SF, apocalyptic (as are "The Great Dark" and "No. 44")
    - "A Curious Pleasure Excursion" (1874): interstellar travel and missionaries to other worlds
    - "The Curious Republic of Gondour" (1875): rational Utopia
    - "Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven" (1907): non-humanoid aliens, "materialist heaven [. . .] in interstellar space"
- "Instantaneous Communication" (1873-1893):
    - "The Loves of Alonzo Fitz Clarence and Rosannah Ethelton" (1878): first story with a telephone as a plot device, "anticipates long-distance calling, calling and paying for the time, bugging a phone, "stealing" music over wire, prevention with anti-tapping devices, portable phones, and specific places for home phones"
    - "Time-Travel Contexts from Connecticut Yankee" (1889):
    - "Mental Telegraphy" (1891) and "Mental Telegraphy Again" (1895): psi-like abilities that can be cultivated rather than pure fantasy
    - "My Platonic Sweetheart" (1912): more a fantasy
    - "From the 'London Times' of 1904" (1998): combines phones and TV
- "Doubtful Speculations" (1898-1905):
    - "The Great Dark" (1862): ship in a water drop, infinite miniaturization
    - "The Secret History of Eddypus" (1972): future developed following guidelines from Mary Baker Eddy, Nightmare Cycle of History
    - "Sold to Satan" (1923):
    - "3,000 Years Among the Microbes" (1967): character changed into a cholera germ, infinite miniaturization, Nightmare Cycle of History
- "The Generation Iceberg" and "Shackleford's Ghost" complement "Great Dark" and "'London Times'"

- "Shackleford" and "The Mysterious Balloonist" contain plot-details of "A Murder, a Mystery, and a Marriage," synopsized because of its unavailability in 1984. Like it, "Generation Iceberg," whose inhabitants know only an icy interior as reality, anticipates enclosed-worlds (and Lost World themes of Conan Doyle, Rider Haggard, and Edgar Rice Burroughs) in "3,000 Years" and "Great Dark" (xxv-xxvi). "Dark's" Superintendent of Dreams recaps "Shackleford's" Invisible Man (357). Citing Tuckey, Ketterer offers "History 1,000 from Now" as "the germ of "Eddypus""(380).
  - *The Mysterious Stranger*
  - *Letters from the Earth*
  - "Which Was the Dream?"
  - "Which Was It?"
  - "No. 44"
- New biography is out
- DeCandido: 19th century literature
- Ketterer has two titles
- Leeper: *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*'s time travel is fantasy; the other stuff in it is science fiction or secret history
- DeCandido: It is scientific fiction, rationalism versus romanticism
- Leeper: Twain was really into technology, but a poor judge of what would be successful
- Prellwitz: Twain was pals with Nicolai Tesla and Thomas Edison
- DeCandido: The triumph of rationalism over mysticism
- DeCandido: Mary Shelley was also vague about technical details
- Leeper: But it wasn't a triumph--there was a bleak outcome
- Audience: Twain was a moralist; when Arthur visited people Twain was very preachy. He was offended by the "pseudo-medieval airs" of the South, and had an anti-Sir-Walter-Scott take on things.
- Leeper: Science fantasy
- Leeper: *Lest Darkness Fall*
- Audience: *The Hound of the Baskervilles* was rationalism over mysticism
- Prellwitz: Twain believed in God, but disliked Him
- Leeper: He was the Philip Pullman of his time.
- Prellwitz: Don't read *Tom Sawyer Abroad*, ends abruptly
- Prellwitz: "Literary Offences of James Fenimore Cooper" [not SF]
- Prellwitz: Twain supported women's rights, etc.
- Stout: In *Huckleberry Finn* Jim knew that Pap was dead
- Mark Leeper: But Huck would not have believed him
- Audience: "The Private Diaries of Adam and Eve", *Letters from the Earth*
- Audience: There was a 1940s biopic
- Audience: He was a character in the "Riverworld" mini-series
- Prellwitz: Hal Holbrook's "Mark Twain Tonight"
- Audience: *The Animated Adventures of Mark Twain*
- Leeper: Dead Guest of Honor/Re-enactor at ConFrancisco
- Audience: Jewish God versus Christian God

The 5 Essential Science Fiction Writers
Saturday, 11:00 AM
Tom Purdom (mod), Evelyn Leeper, Andrew Breslin, Byron Connell, Gardner Dozois

Description: "What 5 writers do you absolutely have to read to know what science fiction is about?"

Estimated attendance: 15 people

[The first part is my set of notes from beforehand.]

- Conditions:
    - science fiction, not fantasy or horror
    - essential as writers, not as editors or critics
- What is meant by "essential"? Is it the same as influential (in which case it may not be necessary for readers to read them)?
- H. G. Wells invented or refined all the tropes (alien invasion, time travel, genetic engineering, space travel)
- Jules Verne: created the "hard SF" genre
- George Orwell: only one book, but probably *the* most influential SF book ever
- Robert A. Heinlein: books are still being written that directly show his influence (Haldeman, Scalzi, Doctorow, Card)
- Robert Silverberg: chosen as much for range and longevity as for particular works
- Not:
    - Jonathan Swift--one book, science fiction but few descendents
    - Mary Shelley--one book, science fiction but few *direct* descendents (knowing *about* it is sufficient)
    - Edgar Allan Poe--primarily horror
    - Bram Stoker--one book, not science fiction
    - Aldous Huxley--important at one time, but now passé
    - Isaac Asimov--important at one time, but other than the "Three Laws" little lasting influence
    - Arthur C. Clarke--important at one time, but little obvious direct influence
    - William Gibson--most would include him, but I am ambivalent

[The second part is my set of notes from the panel itself.]

- Purdom: Thinks in terms of books: Frederik Pohl, Robert Reed, Robert Silverberg, Ursula K. LeGuin; Gardner Dozois as editor
- L: Wells, Verne, Orwell, Hainlein, Silverberg
- Breslin: Wells or Verne, Shelley, Clarke, Asimov, Dick
- Dozois: Difference between influential books and influential writers; paradigm shifts
- Dozois: Wells (for the tropes], Heinlein
- Dozois: Wells led to New Wave and would have been published in *F&SF*; Verne was Old Wave and would have been published in *Analog*
- Dozois: Heinlein changed writing style, made it more colloquial and snappy, and without infodumps
- Dozois: Asimov and Clarke followed Heinlein
- Dozois: Alfred Bester's *The Stars My Destination* was another paradigm shift. ; Samuel R. Delany's *Nova* was an attempt to write *The Stars My Destination*; William Gibson's *Neuromancer* was another.
- Dozois: Cordwainer Smith and Jack Vance
- Connell: Lucian of Samosata, Shelley, E. E. Smith, James Blish, James White
- Purdom: Who is essential to someone starting to read science fiction *today*
- Purdom: Wells and Verne are pre-genre
- Dozois: Shelley is a precursor but isolated
- Dozois: Is Heinlein essential to read or to know?
- Dozois: Allen Steele was influenced by Heinlein.
- Audience: Science fiction mysteries of Asimov
- Dozois: John W. Campbell said that the "Three Laws of Robotics" were implicit in Asimov's works; there is a John Sladek novel (*Tik-Tok*) about them
- Breslin: Asimov's "Foundation" led to the idea that social science is in fact a science
- Dozois: But "Cleon the Emperor" refutes psychohistory
- Audience: Theodore Sturgeon made science fiction real literature

- Dozois: He made it okay for science fiction writers to show emotion
- Audience: Sturgeon led to Gene Wolfe, etc.
- Dozois: Sturgeon upped the stylistic ante, and was more poetic; led to Roger Zelazny and Ray Bradbury
- Audience: Edgar Rice Burroughs
- Dozois: You have to be 12 to appreciate Burroughs
- Audience: What is good for 12-year-olds now?
- Dozois: LeGuin and Heinlein young adult novels
- Dozois: Murray Leinster's "Pirates of Ersatz" (illustrated)
- Audience: *Citizen of the Galaxy*
- Dozois: *Between Planets*, *Red Planet*
- Audience: Orson Scott Card, Lois McMaster Bujold, "Tom Swift"
- Philip K. Dick wasn't writing satire, he was writing what the 21st century would be like
- Audience: Kim Stanley Robinson

Does Accurate Science in Science Fiction Matter?
Saturday, 12:00 N
Bud Sparhawk (mod), Lawrence Kramer, Lois J. Wickstrom, Eric Kotani

Description: "Verne criticized Wells for employing impossibilities like time travel. Yet the works of wells have withstood the test of time better than those of Verne. RINGWORLD was scientifically flawed, but was hugely successful. Why should the writer make the extra effort to get it right?"

Estimated attendance: 15 people

- Sparhawk: *Analog* has the most discerning readers; "The story, the plot, the characterizations-- who cares about that?"
- Wickstrom: Fans don't care if the story is good; when we didn't know, things were zippier
- Mars, Venus; go to another solar system
- No more warp drive
- Kramer: If it's too off-track, not good, but some poetic license okay
- Sparhawk: Warp drive is a good example
- Sparhawk: Can be made more believable
- Wickstrom: Even hard science fiction writers accept warp drive and time travel
- [Me: Not Gregory Benford]
- Kotani: Five impossible things listed in *Analog* in 1950, two or three now exist
- Sparhawk: Consistency within science is different from accuracy
- Kramer: Does it take you out of the story?
- Kramer: Not just science (e.g. historical fact)
- Wickstrom: "Star Trek" transporter could do anything so they had to find excuses to break it
- Sparhawk: Daughter is a font geek (and there is a web site pointing out font anachronisms)
- Kramer: Is hard science fiction the same as accurate science fiction?
- Sparhawk: No
- Audience: Ben Bova said you could probably get away with one [inaccurate] item in a short story
- Kramer: Can get away with more in movies
- Kramer: Books are intellectual, movies are visceral
- Sparhawk: Fantasy and meta-science
- Sparhawk: Fantasy tropes
- Audience: Cannot have a full moon during the day as werewolf movies often do
- Audience: Cannot have vampires during the day (though Bram Stoker does)
- Sparhawk: China Miéville's *The City & the City* is fantasy but follows real-world physics

- Wickstrom: Steampunk is the fuzzy area between the distant science fiction extrapolation and fantasy
- Sparhawk: "How much science is too much?"
- Kotani: "When the reader cannot follow the story."
- Kotani: Greg Egan is an example
- Wickstrom: Agrees to some extent
- Kramer: The function is to be interesting and enjoyable
- Wickstrom: When infodumps are longer than the story
- Kramer: Vernor Vinge's *Rainbow's End* is too much for some
- Sparhawk: Are the scientific facts integral or ornamental?
- [Me: "She went outside. The sun was shining, she was temporarily blinded, startled, dropped the cup. It broke."]
- [A bunch of off-topic stuff on religion and moral elements]
- Wickstrom: Cannot show everything; leaving out sex and religion makes commercial sense
- Sparhawk: Writers generally write for money
- Kramer: Other reasons to research: professional pride, don't want to lead people astray [Me: As Michael Crichton did with epilepsy]
- Sparhawk: Researching making beer in space; story in *Analog*, April/May 2011

But That's Not Science Fiction
Saturday, 1:00 PM
Michael J. Walsh (mod), Barbara Bennett, Carl Fink, Glenn Haumann

Description: "Certain types of non-Science Fiction works such as the Sherlock Holmes series, the Regency Romances of Georgette Heyer, much of Kipling and the Hornblower series as widely read by many science fiction fans and writers. Is there something these works have in common with Science fiction? If so, what is it?"

Estimated attendance: 20 people

- [I arrived late and neither Fink nor Haumann had name tents so they are designated as "X" and "Y", but I don't know which is which.]
- Walsh: Flashman
- X: TV show *Leverage* shows process by which people do their jobs (competence porn)
- X: *Oceans 11*
- [E: *Mission: Impossible*]
- [E: *Axe Men*, *Deadliest Catch*, *Ice Road Truckers*
- Walsh: Georgette Heyer's writing
- Y: Early Tom Clancy
- X: Detectives; Parker's Spenser novels more about moral dilemmas, popular in comic fandom (comics is literature of ethics rather than ideas)
- X: Put up some esoteric question about Greek history at a con, not only get an answer, get an argument going
- X: Georgette Heyer like viewing a created world
- X: Claimed half watch Food Network [it was more like 25%, also wrong on which shows]
- [E: *[Mythbusters]*]
- Bennett: Esthetic of adventure, *Braveheart*, epic
- X: Gothic romantic fiction
- Audience: "Hornblower" wrote itself, it told him when it was time
- Audience: "The capable man/individual"
- Same as "competence porn"
- Y: Robert A. Heinlein's heroes

- X: David Gerrold used "who does it hurt", others by "what do we win?"
- Y: Greeks use "who is controlled by fate?"
- Audience: May be capable but also have angst
- X: Thomas Crown
- Walsh: Retief
- X: Hard to have ongoing stories with the super-competent
- X: People hate technobabble, there is no sense of danger
- X: William Tell one of the most boring stories ever
- X: Like will Clark Kent survive in Smallville?
- Mark Leeper: competent versus super-competent; Bond is competent in *Dr. No*, super-competent in *Moonraker*, than dialed him back down, then up, now down again in Daniel Craig
- Walsh: Craig is more human
- X: Now there is off-the-shelf tech
- Walsh: More feral Bond
- Y: Is Bond "almost SF"? consensus-depends on which one
- X: Craig has level of realism that space lasers and invisible cars didn't
- Superman stories needed an ethical dilemma
- Audience: Alternate history, when is it science fiction and when is it not?
- Walsh: Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America*
- [E: Michael Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*]
- Y: The entire "Jack Ryan" series of Tom Clancy is alternate history
- Walsh: Roth was unaware of alternate history
- [Me: Alternate history can have science-fictional elements or not]

How Often Is SF Genuinely Controversial?
Saturday, 3:00 PM
David Louis Edelman, Alexis Gilliland, Stephanie Burke

Description: "We are not talking about works that some people like and some people don't. Think of Science Fiction works that genuinely oppose the accepted views of the day. How many examples can we think of?"

Estimated attendance: 20 people

[Waiting for late panelists is fine--up to a point. That point is no more than five minutes after the scheduled start time.]

- Edelman: "The thing people misunderstand about science fiction is that it's a very conservative genre."
- Gilliland: Strugatsky used science fiction subversively
- Gilliland: Aesopian, with a slave telling stories about the masters
- Gilliland: Was George Orwell's *1984* controversial?
- Edelman: No, I don't think so.
- Gilliland: It presented a view of communism unfamiliar to the United Kingdom; also *Animal Farm*
- Audience: *Animal Farm* was more obviously the USSR
- Burke: Writes erotic science fiction, etc.; interracial, interspecies, gay, bestiality, etc.
- Mark Leeper: The BBC version *1984* was very controversial because it was very scary
- Discussion of school reading lists
- Gilliland: Some think "Harry Potter" is controversial, but there is a big market for the "Left Behind" series

- Gilliand: "Controversy is at least partly audience response."
- Edelman: "What people consider offensive these days is just politics."
- Gilliland: You are entitled to your opinion, but not to your facts`
- Gilliland: Orson Scott Card's "Secular Humanist Revival Meeting"
- Gilliland: Global warming--the controversy would be in writing a future science fiction in which there is no change and no global warming
- Burke: British "exploding children" ads
- Audience: Said *Dangerous Visions* was stories rejected elsewhere [this is not true!]
- [Me: *Again, Dangerous Visions* was not very dangerous]
- Audience: Big publishers no longer control the market

Watch the Skies! Great SF Films of the '50s
Saturday, 5:00 PM
Tony Finan (mod), Orenthal Hawkins, Richard Stout, James Rosin, Steve Vertlieb, Mark Wolverton

Description: "It was the era of Eisenhower, McCarthy, cars with fins, and rock & roll. It was also the era of some of the greatest SF movies ever made, like "Forbidden Planet", "The Day the Earth Stood Still", "Invasion of the Body Snatchers", and "Little Shop of Horrors". (OK, so three out of four ain't bad...) Let's discuss what made the '50's such a great decade for SF movies."

Estimated attendance: 12 people

- Vertlieb: Wrote for *The Monster Times*
- Finan: The cycle actually extended to 1962 or 1963; this is when some projects didn't get made
- Finan: What are people's favorites?
- Hawkins: *Forbidden Planet*: had more effort, no stock footage, etc.
- Hawkins: Scared now they will try to make it cooler
- Vertlieb: *Forbidden Planet*
- Vertlieb: There some science fiction in the 1920s, then it dried up until the 1950s
- Vertlieb: *Forbidden Planet* was a major event, inspired "Star Trek" until *2001: A Space Odyssey* set the standard
- Wolverton: *Forbidden Planet* was a major serious attempt
- Wolverton: Also *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *This Island Earth*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *It Came from Outer Space*
- Wolverton: Jack Arnold was the closest things to a science fiction auteur at the time
- Vertlieb: Arnold's best was *The Incredible Shrinking Man*
- Stout: We can re-evaluate or we can go with visceral feeling
- Stout: *I Married a Monster from Outer Space*
- Wolverton: "You can't judge a film by its title."
- Wolverton: The director had a good eye and visual style, and had worked with Orson Welles
- Wolverton: "Certain feminist sensibility"
- Rosin: *Destination Moon* by George Pal
- Rosin: Not all invaders are hostile (*The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *It Came from Outer Space*)--we fear what we don't understand
- Rosin: Also hostile (*War of the Worlds*, *Invaders from Mars*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*); better when more personal, in a small town
- Vertlieb: Hit it on the head with the word "humanity"
- Vertlieb: Mostly happy endings (except *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *Invaders from Mars*)
- Audience: *Creation of the Humanoids*
- Hawkins: Transformation of the United States: cars, television sets, middle class; world

tensions result in paranoia
- Hawkins: *The Amazing Colossal Man* is technology run rampant; the same with *The Fly*
- Rosin: Studio insisted on the framing story for *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*
- Audience: *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* is steampunk; al subsequent versions are inferior
- Stout: *Mysterious Island*
- Audience: *The Thing from Another World*
- Rosin: Christian Nyby always discussed scenes with Howard Hawks, then made changes
- Vertlieb: Nigel Kneale (the "Quatermass" films and *X the Unknown*
- Mark Leeper: Jimmy Sangster wrote *X the Unknown*
- Hawkins: *Last Man on Earth* and *The Fly* had hopeless endings
- Hawkins: Sequels were always putrid
- Wolverton: What about guilty pleasures?
- Wolverton: Anything with John Agar, especially *The Brain from Planet Auros*
- Hawkins: *Missile to the Moon* (a remake of *Catwoman of the Moon*)
- Rosin: *Queen of Outer Space*
- Hawkins: *The Lost Skeleton of Cadavra* [spoof of 1950s films]
- [Me: *Matinee*, another spoof]
- Finan: *The Monolith Monsters*
- Audience: *Outer Limits*
- Wolverton: Distinguish between first and second seasons: the first was Stefano and Gothic, the second was Brady and more science fiction
- Rosin: *Science Fiction Theater* had two seasons; some are available on YouTube
- Audience: *The Twilight Zone*
- Finan: Subgenres, like giant insects
- Hawkins: Space travel
- Vertlieb: Time travel, escape the confines of reality and move to other planes of existence

One-Hit Wonders
Saturday, 9:00 PM
Michael J. Walsh (mod), Patricia M. Cryan, Lawrence Johnson

Description: "Just as there are recording artists who are known for only one hit song, there are writers known for only one story. "The Cold Equations" by Tom Godwin, "A Subway Named Moebius" by A. J. Deutch, "The Werewolf" by Clemence Houseman, and LUD-IN-THE-MIST by Hope Mirlees come to mind. Why in each case is critical attention focused on only one story by these writers?"

Estimated attendance: 3 people

- "One and done"
- Johnson: The right place at the right time
- Cryan: Norman Juster's *The Phantom Toolbooth*
- Cryan: Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*
- [Me: Daniel Keyes's *Flowers for Algernon*, John Myers Myers's *Silverlock*, Yvgeny Zamiatin's *We*, Zenna Henderson's "People" stories, Harry Bates's "Farewell to the Master"]
- Walsh: Cleve Cartmill's "Deadline"
- [Me: Long list/discussion in *The Stone Reader*]
- Walsh: Stanley G. Weinbaum's *A Martian Odyssey*
- [Me: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, John Jacob Astor's *A Journey to Other Worlds*, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*]
- Walsh: Tom Reamy (but he died early)
- Lots of discussion about J. K. Rowling

- What is a hit?
- [Me: Edwin Abbott's *Flatland*, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*]

The Science Fictionalization of Alternate Histories
Sunday, 10:00 AM
Tom Purdom (mod), Roberta Rogow, Eric Kotani, Evelyn Leeper

Description: "How did the alternate history story become Science Fiction as opposed to political satire, for example?"

Estimated attendance: 30 people

[The first part is my set of notes from beforehand.]

This resembled a panel at Torcon 2003: "Does Alternate History need a Science Fiction Element?" with panelists Alexis Gilliland, Scott Mackay, Mark Rayner, Robert Silverberg, Charlie Stross, and a description of "Is an alternate history most effective when it involves a science fictional element -- e.g., giving automatic weapons to the Confederates, or scheduling an alien invasion at a pivotal point in time -- or is it just as interesting to craft an alternate history that hinges purely on a change in the historical timeline? And if you write the latter, is it still science fiction or simply what historians are now calling counterfactuals?" See .

Silverberg had two types:

- alternate history in its "pure form" (Abraham Lincoln does not get assassinated)
- science fictional alternate history (Lincoln does not get assassinated because aliens put a force shield around him at Ford's Theater)

Poe defined a short story as a story in which one thing happens. Silverberg said that for SF, it is "One unlikely thing happens." Silverberg also said that Poe really meant "One thing happens and then you face the consequences." A lot of alternate histories do not do the second part.

Stross's three (or four) types:

- science fictional category (Harry Turtledove's "World War")
- purely historical "macro-counterfactual" where there was an order not determined by human actions (S. M. Stirling's "Peshawar Lancers")
- ones in which individuals can affect history
- (possible category) ex post facto alternate histories (George Orwell's "1984")
- (also counter-factuals written as essays)

Mackay said that counter-factuals need a more educated audience.

Rayner had a fifth type:

- fictional characters (e.g., Flashman) interact with history

Mackay said there is a difference between making how the alternate history works itself out the main story, and making an alternate scenario the backdrop of a story not directly related to it.

Silverberg said that alternate history is science fiction by its very nature.

[The second part is my set of notes from the panel itself.]

- Kotani: Yoji Kondo
- Purdom: There is a history of alternate history outside the genre
- Purdom: Murray Leinster's "Sidewise in Time", alternate timelines
- Purdom: Time Patrol, etc.
- Purdom: 1970s started alternate history without science fictional element
- Purdom: Harry Harrison's A Transatlantic Tunnel, Hurrah!
- Rogow: *1632* and sequels
- [Me: The "kudzu" of alternate history]
- [Me: Similar to *Island in the Sea of Time*
- [Me: also Arthur C. Clarke and Stephen Baxter's "Time Odyssey" series]
- Leeper: Mainstream authors do non-science-fictional alternate histories (e.g., Michael Chabon, Philip Roth, Newt Gingrinch, Richard Dreyfuss)
- Purdom: Alternate history change the science fictional "what would happen if?" to "what *would* have happened if?"
- Purdom: Was Antietam that important?
- Leeper: Yes--it was the opportunity for Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, which in turn brought the Union British support
- Rogow: Steampunk
- Audience: Errors in history
- Roy Krupp: Battles of Trenton and Princeton
- Leeper: Annie Oakley and the Kaiser
- Audience: Science fiction provides a built-in audience
- Leeper: Washington, general *and* President
- Rogow: Irving Stone's *They Also Ran*

The 5 Essential Fantasy Writers
Sunday, 11:00 AM
Gardner Dozois (mod), Chris Pisano

Description: "What 5 writers do you absolutely have to read to know what fantasy is about?"

Estimated attendance: 7 people

- Pisano: J. R. R. Tolkien, Robert E. Howard, Ursula K. LeGuin, Homer, Fritz Leiber or Michael Moorcock
- Dozois: Not Homer
- Dozois: Tolkien appealed to an already existing "sword & sorcery" audience (according to Donald A. Wollheim)
- [Me: Probably from the pulps, and many small authors]
- Dozois: J. R. R. Tolkien, Robert E. Howard, Fritz Leiber, Jack Vance, H. P. Lovecraft
- Dozois: Lovecraft brought a modern sensibility to monsters ("God can't save you.")
- Audience: C. L. Moore ("Jirel" stories)
- [Me: J. R. R. Tolkien, Robert E. Howard, H. P. Lovecraft, The Brothers Grimm/Andrew Lang]
- Dozois: *Unknown Worlds* led to urban fantasy, also funny fantasy (L. Sprage de Camp & Fletcher Pratt, Terry Pratchett)
- Dozois: Urban fantasy is not the same as paranormal romance
- Dozois: LeGuin influenced high fantasy
- Dozois: Lin Carter's "Ballantine Adult Fantasy" did not sell well
- Dozois: Judy-Lynn Del Rey found Terry Brooks, and he sold, then high fantasy became formulaic

- Dozois: "Lovecraft was one of the great letter hacks of all time"; he corresponded with Robert E. Howard (among others)
- Pisano: Clark Ashton Smith was also in the triumvirate
- [Me: Lord Dunsany]
- Dozois: August Derleth was very influential as an editor (as was Carter)
- Audience: Neil Gaiman, Patricia McKillip
- Audience: Lois McMaster Bujold is moving to fantasy
- Dozois: Charlaine Harris, Laurell K. Hamilton, Patricia Briggs, Stephanie Meyer, *True Blood*
- Dozois: J. K. Rowling had the most influence of all in the last ten years, though they're all fantasy tropes I've seen before
- Audience: Talbot Mundy
- Dozois: A. E. Merritt (almost forgotten now), James Branch Cabell (ditto), and Thorne Smith

Miscellaneous

The grid was confusing and there was no map or room numbers in the Pocket Program. There was also no on-line downloadable program. Panelists' schedules went out too late to incorporate changes in the Pocket Program, or for much preparation by the panelists.

There were no tent cards--apparently some tent cards were destroyed, so they decided not to issue any at all.

The con suite food included hard-boiled eggs and peanut butter, but no candy.

Waiting for late panelists is fine--up to a point. That point is no more than five minutes after the scheduled start time. One panel waited considerably longer.