Philcon 2016
Convention report by Evelyn C. Leeper
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**Hotel**

The Crowne Plaza Cherry Hill has in the past been a reasonably nice hotel, but this year it has really gone downhill. The least of the problems was that the lower floor we got no longer gave us a beautiful view of the river. Well, okay, *someone* has to get the lower floors.

But the room had major problems. The heat seemed to stop working Saturday, or maybe it was just that the temperature outside dropped and it got very windy, because the window did not completely close and cold air was whistling in all night. The telephone did not work because the cord connecting it to the wall was broken. The radio made weird buzzing sounds (not the alarm) and eventually we unplugged it altogether. They left four coffee packs in the room--all decaf. And most annoying, I reported the phone and radio problems Saturday morning and they said they would have someone fix them--but they did not.

Also, the elevators seem slower each year. This year they had additional problems: some buttons inside some of the elevators did not work (e.g., "10" would work only on the righthand panel, not the left), and occasionally elevators would skip a floor or decide to clear the panel and reverse direction.

The committee had apparently decided that the Plaza rooms did not need microphones; they were wrong. I noted early on that the air conditioning in Plaza II was very loud and made hearing the panelists difficult, but this was a problem in other rooms as well. Why is it that people tend to speak too loudly when they are talking on a cell phone, but too softly when they are speaking to an entire room?

**The Death of Whimsey**
**Friday, 6 PM**
**Chuck Rothman (mod), Peter Prellwitz, Marilyn 'Mattie' Brahen, Joan Wendland, Neal Levin**

Description: "There's been a strong march in recent times towards writing worlds that are violent and cold in a claimed attempt to make stories that are more "realistic". Is this a reflection of the times, authors thinking they need to be super-serious in order to be taken seriously, or a grim assertion that happiness isn't real? Can we bring back light-hearted romps any time soon, or are we stuck with "gritty" realities for the next decade or two?"

What is whimsey? Terry Pratchett, Hope Mirrlees, Piers Anthony, Frederic Brown, Bob Shaw )"Who Goes Here?"), Douglas Adams, Robert A. Heinlein (*The Soor into Summer*), Andy Weir, A. Lee Martinex, Neil Gaiman, Connie Willis, Ron Goulart, Robert Sheckly.

([For dramatic presentations, I would add *Bewitched* and *My Favorite Martian*. Wendland later mentioned *Futurama* and *Red Dwarf*. Other people added *Tomorrowland* and some of Hayao Miyazaki's work. Clearly there is a generational difference here. Just to name something more recent, I will add some of the Coen Brothers' work.]

Parody is not whimsey. And Rothman noted that "humorous works are not as well regarded [as serious ones]. These days people want realism." It does seem that most of the authors listed are no longer writing (or even alive)--but then that is true of authors in general. Someone in the audience suggested that teenagers want "serious" because it seems more adult.

Prellwitz suggested that another problem is that whimsey needs time to develop, but attention spans are shortening. Still, "Harry Potter" has plenty of whimsey even though it is also dark. Brahen said,

"Whimsey doesn't have to be humorous; it can be dark."

Someone in the audience noted that 80% of the examples given at the beginning were fantasy, not science fiction. Wendland recommended Dan Kimmel's *Shh! It's a Secret!* as whimsical science fiction. Rothman suggested Christopher Moore, and also Jasper Fforde's *Shades of Gray*. He also observed that most stories in magazines tend to be serious.

Wikipedia claims that whimsey is "quaint"; can science fiction be quaint? Yes--just think of steampunk.

### Let The Deep Ones Sleep: Early Horror Fantasy \*Not\* Penned By H.P.L.
### Saturday, 7 PM
### Darrell Schweitzer, Mark Singer, Vikki Cíaffone

Description: "While certainly the best known of the early existential horror writers, Lovecraft was far from the only one exploring the ideas of mind-warping terrors and ancient cults. What other contributors to the field deserve equal recognition, and what concepts were their legacies?"

Well, they began with the obvious ones: A. E. Merritt and Fritz Leiber. Leiber's novel *Conjure Wife* was made into the film *Night of the Eagle* [UK title], a.k.a. *Burn, Witch, Burn* [US title]. Merritt's novel *Burn, Witch, Burn* was made into the 1936 film *The Devil-Doll* and also the 1961 film *Muñecos infernales*, a.k.a. *The Curse of Doll People* This is in no way connected to Ann M. Martin's book *The Doll People*, or her series of the same name. Are you thoroughly confused yet?

Anyway, panelists listed a few that people might be less familiar with: Arthur Machen, Lord Dunsany, Clark Ashton Smith, Algernon Blackwood, M. R. James, Sheridan LeFanu.

In terms of specific stories, Schweitzer noted that Machen's "The Great God Pan" and "The White People" had a direct influence on Lovecraft's *Dunwich Horror*. He also listed as early "existential horror stories" Blackwood's "The Willows", James's "Casting the Runes", and Dunsany's "Two Bottles of Relish", and James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*.

Schweitzer also talked about the influence of Lovecraft's long essay/short book *The Supernatural in Literature*. He also talked about how people like Lovecraft and Donald Wandrei struggled to find books we take for granted (e.g., Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*).

Singer added William Hope Hodgson's *House on the Borderland*. Schweitzer added that Hodgson's *Night Land* "is like Doc Smith writing Malory" (with fake 17th century prose). And Hodgson's "The Voice in the Night" has been made into both the 1963 film *Matango* and an episode of the television series *Suspicion* (not to be confused with the film *Suspicion*).

Schweitzer continued with Fitz-James O'Brien's "What Was It?", "The Diamond Lens", and "The Lost Room"; Robert W. Chambers's *The King in Yellow*, and E. F. Benson (along with his brothers Robert Hugh, and A. C.). Cíaffone remonded everyone of Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Schweitzer closed with Seabury Quinn.

### Utopias That Make Us Cringe
### Friday, 8 PM
### James L. Cambias (mod), Ellen Asher, Larry Hodges

Description: "Many of the 'perfect' societies in classic SF are not ones we would want to live in. Is this because society today is more complex or because we are less na‹ve these days?"

Cambias began by clarifying that the topic was not a society that *seems* to be utopian but hides a

secret (e.g. "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas").

Asher said that utopias because people are not the same. As she put it, "Utopia for me is hell for you." Thomas More described his Utopia as having beautiful music, but Asher asked, "Who chooses the music?"

Hodges compared this to Mike Resnick's Kirinyaga, which was ideal for some (mostly the men), but not for others (mostly the women). Asher commented on this and other rural utopias, noting that most utopias (or their authors) have a false view of farming.

Cambias gave a quick run-through of the classical utopias that current writers draw on: *The New Republic* by Plato, *Utopia* by Thomas More, *The New Atlantis* by Francis Bacon, *The Begum's Fortune* by Jules Verne, *Looking Backward* by Edward Bellamy, *News from Nowhere* by William Morris, *Herland* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and *Men Like Gods* by H. G. Wells. He described the first four as "space-based" (existing as a separate society in a non-utopian world) and the last four as "time-based" (at some point in the future, the entire world becomes a utopia).

More recent fictional utopias include *Walden Two* by B. F. Skinner, the Federation (of "Star Trek"), *The Dispossessed* by Ursula K. LeGuin (really?), and Ian Banks's "Culture" (another questionable one). Asher added *Lost Horizon* by James Hilton (my father's favorite book and favorite movie).

Hodges said that the "Star Trek" Federation was a true utopia, while the Eloi's utopia has a dark secret, and Kirinyaga is a utopia for some, but not for all. Cambias felt that Star Trek and Kirinyaga were really the same, though did not elaborate (enough) on this.

Asher said that a true utopia would have to allow people to leave, and noted that there were many failed utopias in the United States in the 19th century. (The site of one, in Phalanx, New Jersey, is only about ten miles from where we live.) John Humphrey Noyes's *Strange Cults and Utopias of Nineteenth Century America* is the classic work in this regard.

Hodges said that there is a fourth type of utopia: perfect but on the verge of falling apart. As an example, he suggested the film *Demolition Man*.

Asher added to her earlier comment on farming that most utopias do not address who is cleaning the sewers. (Jo Walton does cover this in *The Just City*, but only by having a slave class. The slaves are robots, but eventually the question arises, "If the robots appear to have sentience and intention, isn't it wrong to keep them as slaves?") This led Hodges to suggest virtual reality as a utopia of sorts.

Cambias asked a basic question: "Why are there utopian fictions?" More, he said, was not writing to entertain--he was writing a set of directions for society (as of course was Plato). Asher said that these authors are misguided, because you cannot eliminate unhappiness. A lot of utopian fiction is satiric; Hodges mentioned "Harrison Bergeron" by Kurt Vonnegut, and Asher cited "City of Truth" by James Morrow. Hodges said that even *The Truman Show* was a utopia, at least for Truman.

An audience member noted that *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley was both a utopia and a dystopia.

Asher summed up a lot of the problems by saying, "Perhaps the only way to achieve a utopia is to stop being human," and that is perhaps the message of Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End*.

Something Hodges said about achieving "artificial happiness" reminded me of Greg Egan's "Reasons to Be Cheerful", about someone who had the ability through chemicals to control his emotional states. Is that utopia? Asher thought that "total mind control just isn't viable," so that would seem to rule out these "artificial utopias."

[Another utopia would be the libertarian one in *The Great Explosion* by Eric Frank Russell.]

In regard to "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas", Asher felt that people should not just walk away, but should free the child.

Cambias asked why the Eloi have not advanced to be smarter or faster, but the fact that we never see any children makes one wonder about the reproductive process and whether natural evolution would be in effect. After all, in our world cattle are not advancing to be smarter ot faster.

**"Reverse the Polarity? But that Would...!"**
**Friday, 9 PM**
**John Ashmead (mod), Ken Fink, Tobias Cabral, L Hunter Cassells, Mike McPhail**

Description: "Basic physics and engineering for writers, or, How to keep someone with even a cursory understanding of the physical sciences from being thrown out of reading your story."

Ashmead said that a better example would be "reverse the polarity of the neutron flow."

As an example, McPhall said that David Weber does not handle orbital mechanics in combat. (He suggested that maybe treaties prevent it.) And of course, there are many errors in the film *Gravity*= Cabral added *The Martian* by Andy Weir, for its sandstorm. (Most of the rest is pretty accurate.)

Castles observed that one cannot see a crescent moon at midnight, even in a magic world.

Ashmead went back to the title and asked why it seems to work dramatically? [It may be that some authors are thinking of older telephones, where you need to worry about the polarity to get them to work. Trust me on this one.] Ashmead said that this sort of thing goes back at least as far as "The Platner Experiment" by H. G. Wells. And McPhall said that "Star Trek" (any generation) is a gold mine for this.

**The Classic Hammer Films: An Overview**
**Saturday, 11 AM**
**Steve Vertlieb (mod), Richard Stout, John Vaughan, Tony Finan, Mark Leeper, James Chambers**

Description: "Hammer Films released numerous productions from the 50's through the 80's. From Frankenstein and Dracula with Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing to the astonishingly brilliant Quatermass films, these movies helped set up the future of Science Fiction media."

Vaughan is on the "Horror Etc" podcast, which has had a special episode on the "Quatermass" films. (The actual information is from someone in Ireland, not the hosts. This was a relief, since one of the hosts referred to the character as "Quartermass"! It's "Quatermass", with no "r" before the "t". And while we are at it, it is "Allan Quatermain", ditto.)

Vertieb has received a Rondo Lifetime Achievement Award for his work with *Monster Times* and elsewhere.

Vertlieb said that in the 1930s through the 1950s Universal Studios was king. However, Hammer was not a Johnny-come-lately; it started in 1934 with *The Mystery of the Marie Celeste* (a.k.a. *Phantom Ship*). They really came to the fore in 1955 with *The Quatermass Xperiment* (a.k.a. *The Creeping Unknown*). Vaughan noted that at the time *The Quatermass Xperiment* was made for television (1953), only 30% of the households in the United Kingdom had televisions. (If you wondering about the title, the television serial was *The Quatermass Experiment*. When it was made as a feature film, it was renamed *The Quatermass Xperiment* to capitalize on the British "X"

certificate, labeling it "Suitable for persons 16 years and over." In the United States, there was no "X" certificate, and the name "Quatermass" was not well-known, so it was re-titled *The Creeping Unknown*. Recent DVD releases in the United States have reverted to the original British title.)

Stout said that people in the United States do not realize how popular some of Hammer's non-science-fiction/non-horror films were. For example, *On the Buses* was bigger in the United Kingdom than *Diamonds Are Forever*.

Finan said that Hammer "brought a level of intelligence" in the "Quatermass" films that was not seen in American science fiction films of that time, and it made American filmmakers "up their game." Vertlieb said that Hammer films were almost Shakespearean. Perhaps they were lurid, but they "brought a mature luridity" to the screen.

Leeper said that Hammer was really the third wave of horror. First came German Expressionism, then the Universal horror cycle, and then Hammer. German Expressionism and Universal were both in black and white (with the notable exception from Universal of *The Phantom of the Opera* (1943)); Hammer introduced color and action. Vertlieb said that the "blood" used in Hammer films was called "Kensington gore" and was apparently allowed because it was not actually blood. (This sounds odd; did some studios use actual blood?)

Vaughan and Stout agreed that you really need to see these films on 35mm to appreciate them.

Castles said that Hammer save not just the horror genre, but British films in general as well. The Roger Corman films echoed a Hammer sensibility, and of course Hammer kept Michael Ripper employed for so many years.(his first Hammer film was *The Adventures of P.C. 49* in 1949; his last was *That's Your Funeral* in 1972). (Later, Vaughan said that he thought that Roger Corman's *Masque of the Red Death* was a Hammer rip-off.)

Vertlieb noted that Hammer films were often not considered "respectable"; he said he had to sneak away to see them. Leeper said that given such ad lines as "Frankenstein spills it and Dracula drinks it!" that was not too surprising.

Vertlieb said one must also acknowledge Hammer's "loyal stock company of accomplished actors." There is also a thick volume, *Hammer Films: The Unsung Heroes* by Wayne Kinsey, which discusses the people behind the camera: set designers, costumers, make-up artists, and so on.

Vertlieb said that Hammer was the big company in Britain, but there were smaller studios worth mentioning that tried to emulate them, such as Amicus and Tigon. Tigon best-known film was *Witchfinder General* (a.k.a. *The Conqueror Worm*), but Vaughan noted that its director Michael Reeves died young; Amicus made *Dr. Terror's House of Horrors*, *Scream and Scream Again*, and other anthology films.

Asked the their favorite Hammer films, the panelists showed almost total unanimity. Vaughan said it was the "Quatermass" trilogy, Stout said *Quatermass 2*, Finan said *Quatermass and the Pit*, Vertlieb compromised by saying the "Quatermass" trilogy with *Quatermass and the Pit* in particular, Castles also named the "Quatermass" trilogy, and Leeper also said *Quatermass and the Pit*.

Vertlieb said if he were picking something *other* than a "Quatermass" film. it would be *X the Unknown*, which was actually originally intended as a "Quatermass" film, and Leeper also recommended *The Devil Rides Out*. (In keeping with the plan to confuse film fans, *Quatermass 2* was based on the serial *Quatermass II* and was renamed *Enemy from Space* in the United States, *Quatermass and the Pit* was renamed *Five Million Years to Earth*, and *The Devil Rides Out* was renamed *The Devil's Bride*.)

Castles said he had a soft spot for *The Lost Continent*, *The Reptile*, and *To the Devil a Daughter*, but the closest to his heart is *Horror of Dracula*. (Guess what? In Britain, this was titled just *Dracula*.) Finan said that it appears to him that the Hammer *Dracula* was influenced more by the Spanish-language *Dracula* than the Lugosi version. (Poor Carlos Villarías--the English-language version is always called "the Lugosi version", but no one ever calls the Spanish-language version "the Villarías version"=) Stout said that there is actually one brief shot of Lugosi in the Villarías version: that of Dracula's hand reaching out of the coffin. The Villarías version also was an influence on *Kolchak: The Night Stalker*.

In keeping with Leeper's comments about Hammer adding action, Vertlieb said that the killings in the Lugosi version were much blander than those in the Hammer version.

Someone in the audience put in a vote for *The Abominable Snowman of the Himalayas*, which Stout noted had Forrest Tucker and Milton Berle.

Vertlieb felt that if one were to choose the low points of Hammer films, the rape scene in *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed* would surely be one of them. (Peter Cushing hated it.)

Vertlieb also said the panelists should at least mention the new Hammer Studios. (One wants to describe it as "risen from the dead," but one will resist.) (Okay, one won't.) Their films include *Woman in Black*, and *Let Me In*, and *Wake Wood*. Someone thought that Jimmy Sangster had written a script for Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Horror in the Heights", but it was never filmed.

Vertlieb closed by saying that he felt that the Hammer version of *The Mummy* was the definitive version.

### The Changing Nature of Fandom
### Saturday, 12 N
### Evelyn Leeper (mod), Suzanne Rosin, Michael J. Walsh, Inge Heyer, Matt Black, Eric Hardenbrook

Description: "Fandom has changed in a lot of ways over the years. Technology has taken us from typewriters and printed fanzines to the internet and digital archives. Conventions have shifted in both the demographics of those participating and the purposes of attending. But there's also changing fandom standards, mores, and unspoken rules, such as the new culture of safe spaces and trigger warnings. A discussion of how not only the technologies, but the social aspects of fandom have changed."

Even the question of when the panelists came into fandom showed the range of fandom; Hardenbrook started in 1990, Rosin in the 1980s, Heyer in the 1970s, Walsh in 1969, Leeper in 1968, and Black "all his life".

Rosin said that fandom was changing in part because now people at conventions forget/ignore societal norms. Black said there are more conventions with "adult" stuff. Hardenbrook thought we should look more at the positive aspects than the negative ones.

### The Hunt for Alien Worlds
### Saturday, 2 PM
### Inge Heyer (mod)

Description: "With new and more sensitive technology it has finally become possibly to search for planets around other stars. Since the age of science fiction people have imagined what other worlds might look like, now we can at least infer some of their characteristics. It won't be long until we will be able to take pictures. What are these worlds like? Can we compare them to our planets? And if

there should be life on these worlds, how might it perceive the Universe? We will go on a journey, both fanciful and very real, to see what we have found in our search for alien worlds. We will compare some of our findings with worlds we've seen in Star Trek."

This was a presentation clearly aimed at science fiction fans, with lots of references to "Star Trek", "Star Wars", and other science fiction works.

The primary locations on Earth looking for exo-planets are Kitt Peak, Mauna Kea, the Canary Islands, and Chile. There are also the space-based telescopes Kepler, Compton, Spitzer, Chandra, and Hubble. (Kepler was specifically designed to search for exo-planets.)

The basic problem, of course, is that the star around which an exoplanet revolves is like "a floodlight next to a small planet." Astronomers put a black dot in the telescope to create an artificial eclipse, which helps them see the planets. There is also "a Doppler shift due to stellar wobble."

Heyer talked about HD 46375 (a "hot Jupiter"), and noted, "In science there is no thing that is truly unique; everything is part of something else."

There is the Kepler 62 system, with 62E and 62F roughly Earth-sized and in the habitable zone. Heyer said that bigger planets can be further away from the sun because they keep internal heat longer and have more volcanoes to renew ground cover and atmosphere.

(I found myself wondering what happens if astronomers have numbered/lettered the planets around a star, and then discover a smaller planet they had missed, (e.g.) between E and F. Do they re-number/re-letter?

Astronomers are looking for regions for Earth-like life. Water seems to be everywhere: Europa, Ganymede, Iapetus, Mars, ... Europa even has plate tectonics. We know that HR 8799C has water so others around HR 8799 might as well.

Proxima Centauri b is the closest Earth-like planet.

Kepler 16b orbits two suns, so it is called Tatooine (unofficially, of course, but widely).

(Does Earth have an official name, like Sol 1B? What about the moon? Do moons in general get names?)

is where one can get the latest information about exo-planets.

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**The Cloak of Invisibility**
**Saturday, 3 PM**
**Ken Fink (mod), Jon Kilgannon**

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Description: "For a millennia we have searched for a way to be invisible to friends and foes. From ancient mythological tales to present-day popular literature, humans have come up with stories featuring such an item. How close is technology to developing a real invisibility cloak...or have they already succeeded, and we just haven't seen it?"

Kilgannon said there are basically two methods of invisibility: cameras, and Fresnel break spots (which work only for point light spots and spheres). There are also camouflage-like (stealth-like) methods.

A basic problem (issue) is the index of refraction.

Fink said that we do not see things, we see the effects of things. And there is a difference in whether you make something specific invisible, or whether you just make an invisible thing?

Some suggestions included mirrors, blinding the observers, using a pair of cell phone cameras to transmit images from the back of an object to its front, shortening observers' attention spans, and "pretexting" (which seems more social engineering than making something invisible. A lot of this ties into eyewitness unreliability.

**Things You Should Read That You Might Not Have Heard About**
**Saturday, 5 PM**
**Evelyn Leeper (mod), David Walton, Chuck Rothman**

Description: "Not every worthy novel or short story is noticed in time to be nominated for a Hugo, Nebula, or World Fantasy Award. Find out about recent works which are definitely worth a read even though not everyone is talking about them ... yet."

Well, "recent" is in the eye of the beholder. I recommended the complete works of some authors, and obviously not all of them were recent.

The purpose of this panel was pretty much to generate a recommended reading list, so rather than try to give blurbs for all the books, I will stick to just giving the list, by panelist:

- Chuck Rothman:
  - Andreas Eshbach, *The Carpet Makers*
  - Jasper Fforde, *Shades of Gray*
  - Christopher Moore, no specific work (humor)
  - A. Lee Martinez, *Helen and Troy's Epic Road Quest* and others
  - Eugene Mirabelli, *Renato the Painter*
- David Walton:
  - Will McIntosh, *Faller*
  - Sylvain Neuvel, *Sleeping Giants*
  - Charlie Jane Anders, *All the Birds in the Sky*
  - Lawrence M. Schoen, *Barsk: The Elephants' Graveyard*
  - Jason Gurley, *Eleanor*
- Evelyn Leeper:
  - José Saramago, no specific work (Nobel Prize Laureate, most of whose work is science fiction or fantasy)
  - Kazuo Ishiguro, no specific work
  - Jeffrey Barlough, no specific work ("Charles Dickens meets H. P. Lovecraft")
  - Rhys Hughes, no specific work ("Jorge Luis Borges meets Howard Waldrop")
  - *Conjunctions* (anthology series)
  - various, *The Best American Science Fiction of 2015* et al (Houghton Mifflin series)
- Audience members:
  - Grady Hendrix, *Horrorstör*
  - David Mitchell, *Slade House*
  - Yoon Ha Lee, *Ninefox Gambit*
  - Paul Tremblay, *A Head Full of Ghosts* and *Disappearance at Devil's Rock*
  - Ben Winters, *Underground Airlines* (not to be confused with Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad*, which has also gotten a lot of buzz)

[One problem with the scheduling was that the observant Jews in the audience could not take notes of the recommendations. I found one and arranged to mail him this write-up, but panels of the sort that make people want to write everything down might be better scheduled for Sunday.]

### What's with the AI Apocalypse?
### Saturday, 7 PM
### David Walton (mod), James Beall, Bob Hranek, Jon Kilgannon, Anastasia Klimchynskaya

Description: "The tendency in sci-fi since Mary Shelley first brought it to life has pretty much been that manufactured lifeforms will rise up and destroy humanity, or at least subjugate it. Even the need for Asimov's Three Laws indicates that AI can't be expected to decide on their own that human life should be valued. Why are we so scared that if we create a sentient being, it'll rebel against us? Is it because we perceive it as non-human and "other" and are scared of what is unlike us, or are we afraid that it'll be too much like us?"

(Klimchynskaya said that someone actually thought her name was a pseudonym.)

Klimchynskaya said that are ten times as many stories with bad results from artificial intelligence as there are with good results--why is that? She speculated, "The rise of the machines is a very dramatic story." We as humans have a hard time seeing even other humans as humans, so we naturally project that AIs would not see us as human (i.e., respect us).

Beall said the military is less trusting of artificial intelligence than civilians: the Navy has humans in control of nuclear reactors, while commercial plants have automated controls run with artificial intelligence. (Later Hranek claimed that shortening the decision loop has always been a military goal, but this seems to be a counterexample.)

Kilgannon said that AIs are stand-ins for our children and our fears of them. Beall said there are many stories where AIs are not antithetical. However, he also thought hat Isaac Asimov's "Three Laws" meant that his robots are not truly sentient. Hranek said it was more than they were not self-determining rather than not sentient (which of course raises the question of the definition of "sentient"). The real fear is that AIs would think like we do.

Klimchynskaya said that we fear all new technologies, and AIs are no different.

Walton asked, "Can a machine have moral traits?" (This is much in the news these days regarding self-driving/autonomous cars.) Klimchynskaya suggested they might not be immoral, but amoral.

Kilgannon said his real fear about AIs is that someone will say, "It needs to be out in March."

Beall said that in Sarah Zettel's *Fool's War*, the AI acts like a human infant.

Klimchynskaya noted that in so many stories, the AI decides we are the enemy because we try to turn it off (e.g. *Ex Machina*).

Hranek said that we need to ask, "Are we becoming too dependent on the decisions of the machines?" Beall said, "I don't think we're anywhere near sentience, but we're near a decision range."

An audience member asked if empathy was a function or an adjunct of intelligence. Klimchynskaya replied that we are scared of AIs with emotions, AIs without emotions, and AIs accidentally killing us.

### Sherlock's Siblings: The Other Works of A. C. Doyle
### Saturday, 8 PM
### Elizabeth Crowens, Roberta Rogow, Richard Stout, Melissa James

Description: "Arthur Conan Doyle is riding high with the various incarnations of Sherlock Holmes,

but what about his SF, fantasy, and horror tales? Come discover and discuss his other creations."

James recommended the books *The Vampire Stories of Arthur Conan Doyle*, *The Science Fiction of Arthur Conan Doyle*, and "Selecting a Ghost". Rogow mentioned "The Captain of the 'Pole-Star'", Stout added "The Horror of the Heights", and Crowens added "The Ring of Thoth", "Lot No. 249", and "The Great Keinflatz Experiment".

Rogow said that *Micah Clark* was Doyle's first success. She said that Doyle wrote the Professor Challenger stories because he wanted to be Jules Verne, and *The White Company* because he wanted to be Sir Walter Scott. Crowens mentioned *The Maracot Deep* as another Vernian story. And Stout said that when Doyle wrote the Holmes stories, he wanted to be Edgar Allan Poe.

Rogow thought that one reason novels like *The White Company* did not remain popular is that Doyle would "write forsoothly."

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**The Prehistory of SF**
**Sunday, 12 N**
**James L. Cambias (mod), Darrell Schweitzer, Anastasia Klimchynskaya, Richard Stout**

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Description: "Consider all those proto-SF stories going back to Ancient Greece: Lucian of Samosata, Ariosto, Margaret Cavendish, Voltaire, Cyrano de Bergerac. How many of these could be considered actual science fiction? Which had a perceptible influence on early development in the genre?"

Klimchynskaya said that this panel's topic is her dissertation topic. Science fiction begins with Mary Shelley, she said, and everything earlier is pre-science-fiction. For example, *Blazing Worlds* (1666) by Margaret Cavendish and *Utopia* (1516) by Thomas More are in the prehistory. Utopias in particular have a long prehistory, including *The New Atlantis* (1627) by Sir Francis Bacon. Cambias and Klimchynskaya said that Francis Bacon is considered by many to be the inventor of the scientific method, but Stout and Schweitzer said they were thinking of Roger Bacon. (It turns out that Roger invented the scientific method, and Francis invented the Baconian method, which is an investigative method used in science.)

Klimchynskaya said that Gothic literature was another vein of prehistory, with authors such as Anne Radcliffe giving rational explanations for seemingly supernatural occurrences.

Stout talked about *The Mummy* by Jane Loudon, in which electricity is used to revive a mummy. There was also Cyrano de Bergerac (who was a real person) who "invented" the first rocket to the moon.

Schweitzer said the earliest "science fiction" appears to be by Lucian of Samasota, but most of what was written that far back was more fantasy than science fiction. Voltaire wrote "Micromegas" in 1752, and there was "Tale of a Chemist" (1843), which had anti-gravity, and "The Planet, or How I Lost My Grip on the Earth".

Cambias cited *Somnium* (1608) by Johannes Kepler.

Klimchynskaya noted that "going to space" is not necessarily science fiction. [For example, John Carter gets to Mars by distinctly non-science-fictional means.]

Schweitzer named some other early works: "The Brick Moon" (1869) by Edward Everett Hale, and several works by Edgar Allan Poe, such as *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838) and "The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfall" (1835).

Cambias added "The Man in the Moone" (1638) by Francis Godwin, in which the protagonist uses

geese to get to the moon. There was also a lot of "hollow earth stuff" in the late 19th century.

Klimchynskaya said that lots of science fiction starts with what is basically magic (fantasy), but then proceeds logically. You just have to pretend the magic is science, and quoted Clarke's Third Law: "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."

One audience member cited *The Year 2440* (1771)by Louis-Sebastien Mercier, and another asked if *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) by Jonathan Swift was science fiction. Cambis and Klimchynskaya agreed it was not, because it was satire by intent, not science fiction. (I am not sure that makes sense; wouldn't that mean that *The Space Merchants* by Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth was not science fiction either?)

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**Hard Reset or Branching Continuum?**
**Sunday, 1 PM**
**Jeff Warner (mod), C. J. Cherryh, Gil Cnaan, Elektra Hammond, Robert C Roman**

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Description: "From *The Man WHo Folded Himself* and *12:01 PM* to *The Butterfly Effect* and *Daybreak*, time loop stories can be much more involved than the "person relives a day over and over with no consequences until they learn a lesson" trope popularized by *Groundhog Day*. How many ways has the concept been explored, and what rules makes these approaches distinct from one another?"

Hammond said that this panel should be labeled "Temporarily Out of Order". Cherryh said that the only time loop story she ever wrote was "Threads of Time" (which from her description sounded a lot like "The Brooklyn Project" by William Tenn.)

Warner asked, "What does time travel mean, and why do we do it?"

Cnaan said that he once wrote a math story about time travel. As far as time loops go, repeating time can be great or it can be hell. The stories usually boil down to either correcting mistakes, or discovering one cannot. Roman said that there are two different types of time loop stories: those that focus on personal events and those that focus on historical events. (*Groundhog Day* would be the former; Stephen King's *11/22/63* would be the second.)

Hammond said, "Talking about time is talking about destiny," and also that time is very resilient. Cnaan later said something similar, in that time has defense mechanisms. Cherryh expressed it as inertia, and also compared it to Hesiod's river ("No man can step into the same river twice").

Cherryh observed that space portals used in time loops "screw up the universe." (Someone in the audience called out, "The City on the Edge of Forever".)

Warner made a distinction between rigid time and brachiating time.

Roman asks, "Ethically, why are you changing things?" The rationale seems to be that, yes, something worse can happen, but to someone else or somewhere else.

Cnaan said that this question seems to assume intentional time travel, but there is also unintentional time travel.

Someone in the audience claimed that time travel makes it impossible to achieve anything, because nothing you do is truly permanent.

Cnaan recommended ARQ (a "time loop" Netflix movie).

Warner felt that the real key to time travel is memory. But he also thought that cinema and television created time travel by their use of editing.

Warner also said that going back to change things and going forward to "the" future are contradictory, and therefore implied that authors should probably not combine them into a single story. The 2002 film version of *The Time Machine* did this.

Cnaan closed the panel by saying, "Welcome to the panel; let's begin."

[All of this really ties in with the philosophical question of whether the future "already" exists and we are merely moving into it, or whether the future is created moment-to-moment. NEXT (based on "The Golden Man" by Philip K. Dick), where the protagonist can see two minutes into the future, tries to have it both ways--the immediate future is determined, but after that it can be changed.]

**The Changing Media Landscape**
**Sunday, 2 PM**
**Anastasia Klimchynskaya (mod), Stuart Hellinger, Tony Finan, Daniel Persons**

Description: "There's been many ways in which stories have been told- and consumed- over the years, and yet new variations continue to crop up. Netflix and binge-watching have become a standard approach alongside weekly viewing...which can be done online days after an episode airs. Transmedia storytelling (tie-in books, comics, websites, etc) are also on the rise, as are new forms of serializing stories. How has "New Media" changed the very means and modes of telling stories?"

Dinan started by saying that one of the more obvious examples of the changes in media was that of television series augemnting themselves on the web. Klimchynskaya called this "transmedia storytelling" and said it was mostly franchises that use this.

In another direction entirely, Hellinger said that apps should as "Shazam" can identify musical pieces for you.--certainly a change in how media is used or accessed. I have another note that says "Phillips lights can be changed by show [*12 Monkeys*]." At first it made no sense, but in fact it means exactly what it says: if you have certain types of light bulbs, they react to something broadcast on your television during certain shows to change the lighting level and/or color.

Persons predicted that the 3-D film was not going away. However, he felt the best use of 3-D was to show a character's relationship to his space, as in *Life of Pi*), and he emphasize there were no special cutting techniques for 3-D. Other films with good use of 3-D mentioned by Persons included *Gravity* and *The Walk*. There is also an attempt by some films to use a higher frame rate (120 frames per second rather than 24). He also noted that there are alternate ways to access content.

Klimchynskaya said that in general there is a drive to make fiction and media more immersive. But Persons asked, "How do you tell a story in an immersive environment when people can look anywhere?" And an audience member asked, "What if the immersiveness goes overboard?" Persons thought that the market would limit this, but I'm skeptical.

One attempt at immersiveness was the occasional use of smells in conjunction with such films as Mike Todd's *Scent of Mystery*, John Waters's *Polyester*, and films using Aromarama. Persons said that all of William Castle's gimmicks were more examples.

Klimchynskaya said that one aspect not yet discussed was the legal ramifications of more immersive media. She and Hellinger both referenced a Pokemon episode that turned out to trigger epilepsy in some of its viewers.

The discussion veered into the topic of streaming media, which allows a large amount of data

collection. Another change this brings about is that you no longer buy content, but just license it.

Persons feared that we were losing "serendipitous discovery" because while there were many more channels for media, these were also more focused, and people never have to leave their specific area.

Someone in the audience said that binge-watching (as opposed to one-a-week chapters) changes how you perceive a story.

An ideas for a future panel:

ı Great fungus stories

Philcon needs to allot more "freebie space". At some point in the past, publishers and others would provide books (usually the first book in a series) or pens, or buttons or whatever free to members of science fiction conventions. Rather than spending valuable time and effort distributing these to people as they registered, a table was set up and the freebies put out on them. (This table was also used for flyers and other paper hand-outs.)

With the decline in used book stores that actually bought stock from people, and the fact that even Friends of the Library are getting picky(*), a few years ago people started using the freebie table as a way to "recycle" books they had wanted to get rid of. It started with a few dozen books that came and went over the weekend, but it has really taken off. This year there were hundreds of books that "passed through" that area (Over a thousand would not be an unreasonable statement--one dealer brought six or seven boxes of books that had not sold, and we brought over a hundred of our discards ourselves.)

What this means is that the tiny little shelf behind the table full of flyer racks is no longer sufficient. (I found I had to stage our drop-offs over the whole weekend for lack of room.) It does not appear this phenomenon is going away, so Philcon should probably try to address it, either by adding another real table set aside for freebies to the flyer tables, or more the flyer tables out a bit and add another row of empty tables backing them.

(*)One library near us apparently got some books with bugs, and now requires all donations be individually bagged in sealed bags!