

READERCON 7

PROGRESS REPORT 2

Guest of Honor:

Ursula K. Le Guin

Editor GoH: **Terri Windling**

Memorial GoH: **Cordwainer Smith**

Special Presentation: **James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award**

July 8–10, 1994 Worcester, MA

Notes From the Chair

You don't expect a reward for promoting a good cause, but it does happen sometimes — I know from personal experience. Three years ago I contributed a recipe to a cookbook published to benefit the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award. Today, I am proud to say that Readercon 7's Guest of Honor is Ursula K. Le Guin and that we will host the first "floating" Tiptree Memorial Award.

From the beginning, Readercon was envisioned as something different: a *serious* conference on imaginative literature which brings readers together for a weekend with those who write, edit, publish, illustrate, critique, and market it. We include authors whose works are not marketed as conventional science fiction or fantasy. Our Guests of Honor and pros pursue a highly personal vision of the possibilities of imaginative literature. But serious does not mean stuffy; we embrace the subversive notion that thinking is fun. So, if munching on an endless supply of chocolate-chocolate chip cookies, biscotti, and cheesecake while listening to or participating in one of our panels is your idea of a great time, I'll see you in July.

— B. Diane Martin

Guests of Honor

A friend of mine and I were talking on the phone recently, about the way that people who read our books seem frequently to think they know us. We agreed that this was a mistake on their part, but, as I often do, I continued the conversation after I'd hung up my phone, now forced to take all sides myself, and I began to wonder how much of a mistake it was.

My first glimpse of **Ursula K. Le Guin** came when I was in college and read her remarkable novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Certain things were obvious about her from the text — that she was a woman of great wit, great compassion, great



tolerance; that she had a lively mind, an educated heart, and an ear for beauty. Now I have met her for real, I know that all these things are dead-on true. And how could they not be? Just read the book.

For me, *The Left Hand of Darkness* is part of that small, special category of books I think every writer has — books that you reread every few years. Something in this particular book nourishes my soul. The ending of the book with the trek across the ice is one of my favorite passages in all literature — the emotional pitch is so very high for me, I actually become short of breath, reading it.

But if you asked me which my favorite Le Guin book is, I would tell you it is the one I have read most recently — *The Searoad Chronicles*. And this, in itself, I find sort of astonishing. This is her umpteenth book. I forget how many others there've been, and I've read them *all*, and she is still growing, still improving. Almost, *almost* I admire her more for how much she attempts, than for the grace and beauty she achieves. She takes on so much with each book, so much that is new. She *thinks* so much, plays so much, she dances over the pages. As a reader I'm delighted; as a writer, I'm dazzled. The dazzling Ms. Le Guin. May she write forever and may I always be here to read it.

— Karen Joy Fowler

I first met **Terri Windling** at the second Fourth Street Fantasy Convention in Minneapolis in 1987. I was immediately taken with the elegance and clarity of her arguments during several panels. At first glance, Terri does not seem like the kind of woman to argue over anything. She, you think, would be more at home in the Russian Tea Room, calmly discussing the Pre-Raphaelites, poetry, or any airy Victorian folly, and I'm sure she would. But do not let her looks deceive you. Beneath the gracious, gentle exterior beats the heart of a woman with Convictions, and argue she does. She argues for things which she feels have an intrinsic value, above and beyond the value the marketplace puts on them. Truth, Beauty, Art, and Courage. And more often than not, the market has followed her lead.

Terri is an exceptional editor, but you already know this. You know that she began the Fairy Tale series at Ace and brought it with her when she moved to Tor. You know that she is half of the most exciting fantasy and horror editorial team ever to hit the bookshelves — Terri Windling and Ellen Datlow — or, as some have called them, Sister Light and Sister Dark. You may also know that she has changed the very shape and look of fantasy, encouraging fresh young writers and commissioning unique cover art from such diverse talents as Tom Canty, Rick Berry, and Phil Hale.

What you may not know is that Terri is herself an exceptional artist. During her years in Boston, her Endicott Studios occupied the floor above those of Hale and Berry. At the 1989 Worldcon in Boston, Terri hosted an open house at her studio. I still find it difficult to describe the impact her work had on me, and on everyone who saw it. One drawing especially stands out for me, as I know it does for many others. One by one, visitors would file into a little corner of the studio and return shaken and silent. When my turn came, I had already steeled myself, but I was not prepared for the understated eloquence of the simple charcoal drawing that hung there. A child — silent, naked, marked with bruises — looked back at me out of the paper. The title was "She's such a quiet child."

Terri is not silent. In her soft voice, in her art, she argues passionately for these things: Truth, Beauty, and Courage. And, as one friend put it: Terri's life is Art.

— Nevenah Smith

We all know the story of **Cordwainer Smith**: His first SF story, "Scanners Live in Vain," was published in the obscure, short-lived *Fantasy Book*, but was brought to the public eye in Fred Pohl's anthology *Beyond the End of Time*. As a result of that publication, we learned that "Cordwainer Smith" was actually Paul Linebarger, a diplomat, Far East affairs expert, and the man who wrote *the* book on psychological warfare. "Scanners" opened the door to an entire implied future history, the Instrumentality of Mankind, which Smith fleshed out in another 26 stories.

What is not as well known is the impact Smith had on the career of our Guest of Honor, Ursula K. Le Guin. Her interest in SF was rekindled after receiving a collection of Smith's stories. As she explained in an interview: "I realized that if there was a place for him, there must be a place for me. ... Smith had a highly original imagination expressed in original language ... There is one story of his, 'Alpha Ralpa Boulevard,' that was as important to me as reading Pasternak for the first time and realizing that one could write a novel the way he wrote *Dr. Zhivago*. There are these moments in most writers' careers when you discover that someone else has written down some of these things that have been going on in your own head; that this isn't just a private experience."

—David G. Shaw

The Program

The Program is not just the heart and soul of Readercon, it's most of the internal organs, several appendages, and perhaps a tattoo. We try to think of panels and events no one has ever done and put fresh new twists on the ones they have. From what folks tell us, we succeed. While most cons leave you (and all too often the panelists) guessing what the panels are about, we provide full descriptions not only in the *Program Guide* but in this progress report.

Our regular programming consists of four or five simultaneous tracks. There are panel discussions in two large rooms, each on a stage with easy chairs and coffee tables, and area microphones to pick up all the panelists' dialogue. Two smaller rooms feature author readings and a writer's mini-track of panels and how-I-wrote-my-book presentations. A third small room hosts occasional discussion groups, often on off-the-wall topics (if you'd like to lead one, let us know).

Our Special Events start Friday evening with our Meet the Pros(e) Party, where you get to meet the writers and their writing, and commit Art (How? See the events listing). After our last Saturday panel there's nothing but special events, including a break for our Banquet. There will be a speech by Ursula Le Guin, an interview with her conducted by Pat Murphy, and we will also feature an interview with Terri Windling

The James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award

This award is presented annually to the work of fiction which best explores and expands gender roles in science fiction and fantasy. We are honored to have been chosen as the first convention for the award presentation away from its "home" at Wiscon. This year's award will be presented by Ursula K. Le Guin.

Banquet

We've moved our usual pool party and buffet indoors this year and substituted a formal banquet. Your banquet ticket will guarantee you a good seat at the Tiptree Awards ceremony to follow and the rest of the evening's festivities as well.

The banquet menu consists of salad, rolls, choice of chicken almondine, Boston scrod (that's fish to you non-New Englanders) or pasta primavera, vegetables, choice of dessert, and coffee. Banquet tickets are \$16.95; order your tickets on the return coupon on page 11.

The Tiptree Award Bake Sale

In addition to being the proud hosts of this year's award, Readercon joins other conventions across the country in raising funds for the award the old-fashioned way: with a bake sale. (We will also be selling copies of the two benefit cookbooks *The Bakery Men Don't See* and *Her Smoke Rose Up From Supper*.) If you'd like to donate goodies and/or help sell them, contact Jamie Siglar at (617) 623-0601.

Last year, a few writers and critics donated their review books (galley proofs, advance reading copies, etc.) to the bake sale table. The books disappeared in minutes, but left us with a good idea: If you have review copies you'd like to contribute to the sale effort, please remember to bring them with you.

Read These Books!

At Readercon 3 we had James Patrick Kelly give a talk about the writing of *Look Into the Sun*. (We billed it as "Story Into Novel" only to find out that the acclaimed story "Glass Cloud" was a rewrite of the novel's opening chapters, rather than vice versa!) At Readercon 4 we asked James Morrow to reveal the sordid tale of the composition of *Only Begotten Daughter* (Jim had the ultimate prop: a chapter by chapter outline from which he'd roundly diverged).

It is a swell idea. An author tells, in detail, every stage of a novel's creation — from initial inspirations, to character and plot development, the crafting of the prose, the selling and editing of the manuscript, and the marketing of the book. And most importantly — and most unusually for an sf con — the audience members have all read the book in question, so nary a plot twist is creased, let alone a denouement ruined.

It's such a swell idea we're doing it again this year. These writers are prepared to tell all about their latest book:

Jeffrey A. Carver, *Neptune Crossing* (Tor hc)
Suzy McKee Charnas, *The Furies* (Tor hc, June)
Craig Shaw Gardner, *The Dragon Circle* (Ace hc)
Nancy Kress, *Beggars in Spain* (Avonova pb)
James Morrow, *Towing Jehovah* (Morrow hc)

Writers' Workshop

Once again we'll be hosting a three hour closed writers' workshop for a few amateurs or new pros, led by David Alexander Smith and featuring other members of the Cambridge Science Fiction Workshop. Submit up to 7,500 words of fiction by **June 24** directly to David at:

112 Avon Hill Street, Cambridge, MA 02140.

Readercon Small Press Awards

For some time now, we have felt that the Readercon Small Press Awards, as currently administered, have not been fulfilling their mission. As envisioned, that mission was to increase the visibility of small presses in this field, both to the sf reading audience and in the larger small press scene. We won't go into the problems here; suffice it to say that, with our hosting the Tiptree Awards this year, it seems like an opportune time to take our own awards down for maintenance (and perhaps a bit of re-engineering).

Readercon's other departments :

The Bookshop

The Bookshop is our dealer's room. Expect a varied selection of new and used books and magazines from small and large publishers. Although the Bookshop space is sold out, let us know if you'd like to be put on a waiting list in the event of a cancellation.

Publications

Our *Program Guide* runs 30 or 40 pages. In it you'll find the full conference schedule with panel precis and an index of

each participant's appearances, plus a wide variety of useful information. In the back there are complete mini-bibliographies of every participant — that's right, all of their book titles with dates and publishers, and then some. For those who prefer to travel light, we provide a simple pocket schedule in table form.

Last year our annual *Souvenir Book* had a non-ad page count that matched the Worldcon's. Our book will have original material by and about our Guests, more installments of our regular "Books to Cherish" feature, original artwork, and much more.

The *Readercon Rag* is our at-con newsletter, which appears four times during the conference. It includes program changes, news, trivia, and the all-important Saturday evening party list.

Parties

Most cons with this many pros have large private parties where they congregate. We don't (we're too small overall). So throw your own bash... and anyone might stop by (though probably not Cordwainer Smith).

The Con Suite

The Con Suite is Readercon's own party, where you'll find munchies both nutritious and politically incorrect, and people to talk to (there is a causal relationship here). We try to keep it open during all convention hours (with a little help from volunteers).

Volunteering

Readercon is run entirely by volunteers. We can always use more help, in every area. If you're new to conventions, volunteering is a great and time-tested way to meet people. Let us know you're interested on the form on page 11, and we'll contact you about scheduling you in the areas you'd like to work — or you can just volunteer at the con (although the most interesting jobs may be taken by then). Work enough hours and you'll earn some cool thing or another.

Practical details:

Friday hours:

Program	6:00 PM to 12:00 midnight
Registration	4:00 PM to 9:00 PM
Bookshop	4:00 PM to 9:00 PM

Saturday hours:

Program	10:00 AM to 12:00 mid. (with breaks)
Registration	9:00 AM to 6:00 PM
Bookshop	10:00 AM to 7:00 PM

Sunday hours:

Program	10:00 AM to 3:00 PM
Registration	10:00 AM to 3:00 PM
Bookshop	10:00 AM to 3:00 PM

Memberships

Memberships are \$40. If you've already bought a Readercon membership but find you cannot attend, you may transfer your membership to another person. We ask that you notify us of the transfer to eliminate confusion at registration. Either drop us a line at our post box or email your notification to DShaw@aol.com.

(Some) Policies

- No smoking in programming areas or the Bookshop.
- Only guide animals in convention area.
- No weapons in convention areas.
- While we have no costuming policy, no one at a Readercon has ever worn one.

• Young children who are always with an adult are admitted for free; others need a membership. Readercon does not have children's programming or babysitting.

Our Hotel

The Worcester Marriott is just about perfectly laid out for a conference of our size. From a spot near the elevators, it is nearly possible to see all of the program area as well as the courtyard and indoor/outdoor pool. Both of the hotel's restaurants are good, and there are other restaurants within walking distance. This is our fourth year here; our relationship with the staff is terrific.

For reservations write or call:

The Worcester Marriot
10 Lincoln Square
Worcester, MA
1-508-791-1600

Rates are \$70 single, \$75 double/triple, \$80 quad, \$125 parlor (all rooms add 9.7% tax). Mention Readercon when making reservations.

Getting There

Worcester is about an hour west of Boston by car. The Marriott is just twenty minutes from Worcester Airport and ten from the Amtrak station; the bus station is even closer.

Driving

Take the Massachusetts Turnpike to exit 10, route I-290 east. On I-290 proceed to exit 17, Lincoln Square. At the end of the exit ramp turn left. At the second set of lights turn left; the Marriott is on the right.

If driving from out of state, take I-95 north to I-91 (outside of New Haven, CT) to I-84 east (Hartford, CT) to the Massachusetts Turnpike. From north of New York City you could also take I-684 directly to I-84 east.

By Bus

The bus station in Boston is at 555 Atlantic Avenue, near South Station. There are 15 buses that go from Boston to

Worcester daily, starting at 8 AM and running until 12:15 AM. The bus station in Worcester is located at 160 Southbridge Street. 17 buses daily travel from Worcester to Boston, from 6:15 AM to 12:30 AM. The bus trip takes about an hour.

If you are traveling to Worcester by bus from New York, you must transfer in Hartford, CT.

For fares, information, and schedules call Peter Pan Bus Lines at 1-800-343-9999.

By Train

There are two unreserved Amtrak trains leaving Boston daily (originating at South Station in Boston, with a stop at Back Bay Station): the 6:35 AM arrives in Worcester at 7:35, the 2:30 PM arrives in Worcester at 3:50. The 5:55 PM arrives at 6:55; reservations are required for this train.

The Amtrak station in Worcester is at 45 Shrewsbury Street. Trains leave for Boston at 3:25 PM, 4:10 PM, and 10:15 PM.

There are two direct trains daily from NYC to Worcester (11:30 AM, 5:45 PM), and two from Worcester to NYC (7:35 AM, 3:30 PM).

There are two direct trains daily from Philadelphia to Worcester (9:31 AM, 3:39 PM), and two from Worcester to Philadelphia (7:35 AM, 3:30 PM).

For fares and information call Amtrak at 1-800-872-7245.

By Plane

There are no flights from Boston Logan Airport to Worcester Municipal Airport. Knight's Airport Limousine Service provides transportation between Logan and the Worcester Marriott (\$23 for one person, \$39 for two), call 1-508-839-6252 to arrange a ride.

USAir Express (1-800-428-4322) has direct flights from Newark and Philadelphia.

Continental Express (1-800-525-0280) has direct flights from Newark.

IF YOU CAN READ THIS, THEN YOU DON'T NEED YOUR OLD EYEGASSES ANYMORE.

You've been reading your massive book collection through a series of ever strengthening lenses. And, if you're a typical hard-core reader, then you've probably hoarded your old weak eyeglasses the way you've hoarded all your books. Well, Readercon is providing you with the chance to divest yourself of your hoard (your *glasses*, not your books) and contribute to a worthy cause as well. Bring your old unused eyeglasses to the conference and drop them off the the collection box we'll provide. When the weekend's over, we'll donate them to one of the Boston charitable organizations that provides glasses to those in need. You'll have done a good deed, and the space from your glasses stash might just hold a few extra books...

READERCON 7

The Program

Writing

Just Who the Hell Am I, Anyway? “Every book has a writer ... You know that someone is telling you this story. And you think you know a little bit about this person. Very often the person who’s writing that book is not the author.” — John Crowley, in interview. Even in a third-person narrative, it can be a mistake to think that the sense of the narrator we feel as readers is an actual reflection of the authors as they see themselves. What’s this like for the author, to adopt a persona (directly or indirectly) they feel is foreign to their own? Great sport, or a little bit scary? Do such masques actually reflect something deeper that isn’t foreign at all? What happens when the adopted voice has distasteful elements?

You Can’t Do That in Fiction. Are there things that happen in real life that you can’t get away with in fiction? After all, sheer chance dictates that incredibly fortuitous coincidences do happen, to some people, somewhere, sometime ... why not right here to my hero in chapter 9? Can you use this and similar material (improbable streaks of misfortune, unique incurable diseases, etc.) in a book or story — and make it work?

I Haven’t Always Done This. Many sf writers remember fondly that great day when they sold their first story and promptly quit their paper route. But the field is also full of late starters. Our panelists compare their experiences. How have their inevitably varying backgrounds (scientist, translator, editor, critic, etc.) affected their fiction?

When Cliches Happen to Good Writers. In conceiving and executing a work of imaginative literature, a writer is bound to at least nuzzle up against a few cliches (we’ve got a whole swarm of ’em in this field). When writers (or their editors) find this happening, what should they do? Change the work to avoid the cliché? Keep it, and try to make the cliché fresh and new? How do you do the latter? Can a work be conceived of in terms of clichés reborn?

Are There Ever Good Reasons to Fudge the Science? Some panel titles are self-explanatory.

Novels you Write vs. Novels You Talk About in Bars. A repeat of a classic panel from Readercon 3 (with different panelists, of course). Those who have read John Crowley’s “Novelty” know exactly what this is about. For those who haven’t (yet) ... some books are best left unwritten, because they are essentially unwritable. How do you know which grand ideas you should tackle and which you should just dream about? Do the latter ever get turned into the former? Which concepts have you rejected as unrealizable?

Writer’s Mini-Track

Is Characterization a Gift? If the ability to portray three-dimensional characters were a craft that could be learned, why didn’t Isaac Asimov ever master it? Is this skill a gift (or rather a fundamental part of one’s personality), or not?

Read This, Write Better. Our panelists discuss the non-fiction books that have inspired them to go further with their fiction: books that have given them insight into approach, method, and style, and into creativity and their own psychology.

The Travelling Writer. Must you visit a place to set a story there? Or will a trip to a good library and a few carefully chosen videos suffice? What if the story is set 500 years in the past — or the future? If you choose to go, how do you make the best of the trip? If you can’t go, what are some tips on faking it? What about practical stuff, like making the trip tax-deductible?

How Long Should This Story Be? One not uncommon critical complaint is that a work of fiction was the wrong length. When you’ve got a story idea, what are the ways of divining its ideal length? Why do some stories call out for brief treatment while others demand novel length? We can all think of stories so compressed that it certainly *seems* like they could have been novels, but is this really true?

Losing the Habit of Fiction. Sometimes writers fall silent, or nearly silent, for years. Why? What does it feel like? How does it shape later work? Are there universal elements to this experience, or is it different for every writer? A personal look back (or sideways).

Reading

And Now, the Thrilling Confusion. A cliched formula for great sf is to take the world we know and change a single element. In practice, however, much of the best sf changes as much as the author can get away with — and then omits exposition and eschews infodump, producing a carefully orchestrated bewilderment in the reader (“Start the reader 50 feet underground in the middle of the story and *don’t tell them,*” is the way Alice Sheldon put it). Many sf readers apparently love to be bewildered thusly (and then to figure it out). Why? Is this a metaphor for conceptual breakthrough? Mystery fiction, or the Sunday crossword, for ontology buffs? Are readers of such works just “masturbating with their intelligence” (as a fan who vigorously preferred Heinlein to Wolfe once put it to us)? Or does the secret lie not in the decoding process but back in the state of confusion itself?

If You Like Dick/Le Guin/Gibson, You’ll Like Ummm, Ahhh, That friend of yours doesn’t read sf, but they have read and enjoyed one of our three most real-world-visible heroes. What do you recommend next?

What Misprision Means to Me. Misprision is the term for when a critic gets it all wrong, completely misses the entire point of a book. In his GoH essay for Readercon 4, John Clute argued that such a review could yield insights that no sane review could! Our panelists will, of course, tell entertaining stories of the critics who misunderstood them so badly, but we’ll also ask if, like Clute, they learned anything from those errors.

All Things to All Readers. There’s been a lot of talk (OK, much of it by us) about a growing schism between readers who prefer good old-fashioned sf a la *Analog* and those who prefer it more literary a la *Asimov’s*; in John Shirley’s terms, readers of genre vs. genre-transcendent sf. But there are apparently writers who appeal to both crowds: one brief conversation with someone from the extreme opposite side of the gulf found (among the many expected “love them!”/“hate them!” disagreements) a common regard for Jack Vance, Dan Simmons, Michael Swanwick, Alexander Jablovkov, Geary Gravel, and doubtless many more, had we time to ferret them out. Who are some of the others? What are these writers doing? Should we have just asked “what are these writers doing *right,*” or not?

Precessing the Simulacra for Fun and Profit: A Beginner’s Guide to Deconstructionism. Can’t tell the difference between text and subtext, synchronic and diachronic, syntax and syntagm, sign and signifier? When you hear the word “poststructuralism,” do you reach for your *TV Guide*? Our panel of experts returns from the *recherche* hinterlands of contemporary literary theory to tell you what this stuff has to do with what you read.

We Lack the History. Brian Aldiss’s *Non-Stop (Starship)* is quite a different book if you haven’t read Heinlein’s *Universe*. In fact, most younger readers of sf are experiencing newer novels very differently than the older generation, simply because they haven’t read the classics of the field. To what extent, if any, is this their fault (they can’t easily read Bester or Sturgeon, after all)? Has the backlog of standard works simply reached too large a mass for a new reader to absorb? What effect is all this having? Can we do anything about it?

Slipstream

Out of Boundaries, Take 2. We’ll start with the largest list of “slipstream” books in the known universe (thanks to Bruce Sterling’s list in *SF Eye*, our own panel at Readercon 1, and our own personal book collections). Did we miss anything? What’s the essential stuff here?

Post-Modernists From Both Bookstore Aisles. The literary “mainstream” and the imaginative literature community may be two different worlds, but they are not worlds apart. For one thing, genuine postmodern fiction gets perpetrated by writers on both sides of the tracks. To what extent have our postmodernists been influenced by their counterparts across the bookstore? Are the two worlds converging?

Science Fiction

How Hard SF? In the introduction to the forthcoming anthology *The Ascent of Wonder*, David G. Hartwell defines hard sf as being “about the beauty of truth. It is a metaphorical or symbolic representation of the wonder at the perception of truth that is experienced at the moment of scientific discovery. The Eureka.” In her introduction to *The Norton Book of Science Fiction*, Ursula K. Le Guin suggests “‘hard’ science fiction becomes interesting to the adult reader pretty much as it departs from simplistic moralism and explores the implications of techno/scientific change with a rigorous, but not rigid, intelligence.” Why does the debate over hard sf rage again? (Has it ever abated?) Is it “the center of the sf field” (Hartwell), or is it “a strong and permanent element of the field, [needing] no disinformational propaganda” (Le Guin)? And can we discuss this without once mentioning “The Cold Equations”?

The Left Hand of Darkness, Then and Now. From its initial appearance as an Ace Special paperback in 1969 to its new incarnation as a 25th anniversary commemorative hardcover, Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness* is regarded by many as her masterpiece. It remains one of the most influential works on the subject of gender, so we ask, how has it influ-

enced more recent works on the same subject? As a special treat, the author will discuss (and possibly read from) the recently completed screenplay.

Politics and Political Systems in SF. Although sf is a literature of extrapolation, its innovations concerning politics and political systems are generally very timid, tending toward either real-world systems (i.e., democratic republics, communism) or simplistic variations on current systems (i.e., libertarian or militaristic futures, all-female planets, etc.). There are two questions here, which may be related: (1) Why is the level of creativity in sf so low concerning politics? Is it a reflex of the well-known narrowness of the US political spectrum writ large, in a field where the US for better or worse dominates? (2) In a field where many writers create — and readers demand — complete worlds and ecosystems in great detail (or entirely new and explicit branches of science or technology, to flesh out minor story points), why do so many SF works shy away from the complexities of politics?

Ten Years into the Future. *Neuromancer* was published ten years ago, “Johnny Mnemonic” is soon to be committed to celluloid. Between these two bookends we have experienced a decade of debate, name calling, and the publication of some exceptional sf. Is cyberpunk really dead, a result of euthanasia within the family? Is it merely an advertising buzzword, used to sell video games, “smart drinks,” and nose rings? Or is the genre still alive and twitching, as the appearance of novels like *Snow Crash* and *Crashcourse* attests?

The Fiction of Cordwainer Smith. A look at the work of our Past Master (Memorial GoH).

What We Have Here Is a Failure to Extrapolate, Part 2. In part 1 we examined techno-sociological advances that modern sf failed to predict. This time around, we look at innovations predicted by sf that as yet have failed to materialize. Where are the picturephones, jetpacks, and hovercars? Where are the space stations and L-5 colonies? Why does the artificial landscape of the moon consist of nothing more than flags, golf balls, defunct vehicles, and Nixon’s autograph?

Imaginative Literature

Why Do F/SF Writers Bend Gender? Because they can. Or so we immediately answered when first asked this, full of pride for our thought-provoking, taboo-crushing genre ... then we realized things were a little more complex than that. There are writers — and not just women, but men as different as John Varley and Jack Chalker — for whom gender changes and gender swaps are a theme that borders on obsession. At the other extreme are all the writers, including many women, who have forged notable careers without even once trying such a radical exploration of gender roles. Why this range? Can our panelists, some of whom have written such works and some of whom, despite an interest, have not, cast some personal light on the question? As for our absent writers, none of their psychiatrists will be present for questioning, so can we start with their texts and work backwards?

Dys-ing Each Other’s Utopias. As David Byrne once sang of the idyllic heart of America with its clean air, tasty home-cooked food, and Little League diamonds, “I wouldn’t live there if you paid me to.” Can one writer’s utopian vision strike a chord in every reader? Well, yes, but the chord ranges from Mozart through Stravinsky to Frank Zappa cleaning his piano. How does this knowledge, or the (perhaps naive) lack of it, affect the way we write and read utopias? We’ll look at popular reaction to some well-known texts, and discuss utopian fiction as an ongoing dialectic.

The Writings of Ursula K. Le Guin. Our traditional look at the writing career of our GoH.

Surprise, Surprise, Surprise: The Conceptual Breakthrough Novel. Most of us know and love this classic sf story structure: the world is not as it seems, it’s a mystery to be solved, it turns out that / the universe is a starship — and the starship is... where? / the Second Foundation is here — no, actually it’s *here* / you’re dead — no, we’re dead — actually, *everybody’s* dead / etc. Reality as onion; each time we peel a layer our perception of everything changes. These books can be difficult to talk about, of course, since doing so invariably gives them away — some of them are so subtle (like the novel that inspired this panel, Damien Broderick’s *The Dreaming Dragons*) that they’re even difficult to recommend without spoiling.

Nevertheless, we’ll try. Why does this story structure have such a basic appeal? Is it just a metaphor for scientific paradigm shifts, or does it echo something deeper within us? What makes one trick ending a work of art and another just a trick? What are the fair and unfair ways of withholding information from the reader? How is it different when the reader follows the protagonists on their quest to solve the world, as opposed to slowly figuring out a world the characters already know? What are the classic works of this sort, and what are the great neglected ones?

Philip K. Dick — Beyond the Famous Novels. Most of us know, or at least know of, *The Man in the High Castle*, *Ubik*, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, and so on. But the wonders and delights of, say, *Galactic Pot-Healer* or *Now Wait For Last Year* are less loudly trumpeted. A guide to the second tier of PKD’s work, guaranteed to be good enough to be most anybody else’s first (and often containing some of the clearest statements of his major themes). What made these novels runners-up, anyway? Some major flaw, or just an overall lower level of coolness?

The James Tiptree, Jr. Award Short List. The Tiptree Award panel of judges discuss what works were considered, and how they chose this year's winner.

I'm Mad as Hell, and They'll Pay Me Six Cents a Word: Imagining an Anthology. It starts with J. G. Ballard's "Why I Want to Fuck Ronald Reagan" and ends with Michael Blumlein's "Tissue Ablation and Variant Regeneration: A Case Report." Is there enough angry, outrageous, just plain vicious political fiction to fill an anthology? (If not, are we chicken?) Which writers can be counted on for original contributions? What novels would we like to excerpt? Who will edit it? (Who will *publish* it?)

Fantasy

From Elfland to Poughkeepsie to Worcester: The Language of Fantasy. It seems hard to believe, but Ursula K. Le Guin's classic essay on this subject largely *predates* the explosion in this market. What is the difference between the "genuine Elfland accent" exhibited in the clear English used by Tolkien and the plain "Poughkeepsie style" utilized in so many of these unmemorable fantasy works? Why is superb fantasy so heavily dependent on style? Can anything be done to improve contemporary fantasy writing before it slouches even further — from Poughkeepsie all the way to (horrors!) Worcester?

Orcs of a Difficult Color: PC and Fantasy. If Tolkien were submitting *The Lord of the Rings* today, would his editor tell him to make some of the orcs white and some of the good guys black? How about adding a woman character who wasn't a legendary beauty? And if Tolkien has problems, what about the rest of the field? Or does fantasy transcend such concerns, being at heart mythic or archetypal? When we last visited this topic in 1988 at Readercon 2 (as "Elfland Uber Alles"), the notion of Political Correctness hadn't quite yet crossed the border into that magical realm of Backlash. Changing times (and our guest list) make us eager to hear the debate renewed.

They Wrote *Fantasy*? A Reader's Guide. Many of the well-known names of literature have dabbled in fantasy — and many of these books are well worth seeking out. Were they received any differently due to their fantastic content?

The Conscious and Unconscious Use of Fairy Tale and Myth. Some writers use fairy tale and myth quite consciously, even scholarly. Others pay them far less conscious heed, but have read so much of them that their influence is inevitable. Similarly, some works of fiction are recognizable as old tales in new clothes, while others ring those primal, archetypal bells, but can't as easily be traced back to their sources. We'll discuss these two approaches and these two types of results (and we won't assume that one necessarily produces another).

Horror

Horror Style. Stephen King, Clive Barker, and other highly regarded horror writers are seldom thought of as fine prose stylists. Does the coexistence of fine prose and horror present a special challenge? Through the history of the horror field, have worthy stylists been rarer than in fantasy and sf? (Who have they been, who are they now?) When we read horror, must we redefine our notion of what fine prose is? (Lovecraft's prose is distinctive, but is it art?) And what do we make of the fact that such distinctive f/sf stylists as Ray Bradbury and Theodore Sturgeon arguably produced their finest work in the horror mode?

Never Give a Succubus an Even Break: Funny Horror. Just because humor and terror are at the opposite ends of the emotional spectrum doesn't mean they can't coexist. What is a scream, after all, but a laugh on "puree"? An overview of this sub-genre and a discussion of its difficulties and rewards.

Editing and Publishing

Del Rey Changes. A *Nightline*-style interview with Del Rey editors and writers, and some neutral observers. If ten years ago we'd been challenged to concoct 1994's least likely headline, we might well have come up with "Chart-Topping Punk Band, Critically Acclaimed New Del Rey Authors Among Those to Visit Former Soviet Union (President May Appear On Sax)." But these are strange times. Del Rey has had a reputation for publishing safe, unchallenging, and often not particularly well-written work — a reputation which, however warranted, has arguably harmed the career of their writers who did *not* match that mug shot. Is this one more toppling regime, another wall coming down? A look at the image and the reality — then, now, and tomorrow.

The Norton Book of Science Fiction: Building an Anthology. "67 chronologically arranged North American English-language science fiction stories from 1960 to 1990" — that is the simplest description of this anthology. By sheer virtue of its being a Norton publication, this book will soon become required reading for college courses about sf. Which leads to the questions: Why were these stories chosen? and If you were the editor, would you have done it any differently?

The Career of Terri Windling. The impact of our GoH on the field of fantasy.

Writers and Editors: A Comparative Schmooze. The two editors on this panel have each worked with *both* of the writers. Our writers contrast the editors' approach to editing; our editors contrast the writers' approach to being edited; anecdotes thought to be amusing are related; and, if we're lucky, all four will remain on speaking terms with one another.

Miscellaneous

Hypertext Fiction. Hypertext fiction sure seems like a new art form aborning — and how often does *that* happen? Here's a brand of fiction where, even when the content itself is "mundane," the form is pure sf. Some of the leading practitioners in the field give us a comprehensive overview of where we are and where we're going. Complete, we hope, with hands-on demonstrations.

Everybody's Doing Comics but You. While the sf and comics worlds have always intermingled, it seems like there've never been so many writers of stature crossing over, from Lew Shiner and Rachel Pollack to (coming the other way) Neal Gaiman and Alan Moore. Is this a random blip, or the start of a trend that may, in another generation or so, make this the norm rather than the exception? Or are the two media sufficiently different that only a minority can do both well?

Man and Machine: The Edge Cuts Here (Again). In the sf of the sixties, man/machine interaction pretty much meant talking to HAL or Shalmaneser. (Witness just how much of a fresh jolt *Nova* was.) The reality of the nineties, though, is full of myriad ways, many of them unforeseen, from virtual reality to hyperinstruments. What's the state of the art this very minute? Can we do a better job of looking ahead? What will be the social impact of these various new technologies? Will they be humanizing or dehumanizing? (*This panel ran last year, but is being revived to allow some of our new guests to have their say.*)

Events

Meet the Pros(e) Party. Friday evening. Each pro writer has selected a short, favorite quotation from their own writing. Each is armed with a strip of 2-line mailing labels. The quotation is on the labels; as attendees meet each pro, they obtain a label from them.

What do they do with them? Atheists, agnostics, and the lazy can trust strictly to chance, and paste them into the inside back cover of their Souvenir Book in the order they obtain them. Result: one of at least Nine Billion Random Prose Poems. Those who believe in the reversal of entropy can stick them temporarily on the wax paper we'll provide and then assemble them to make a Statement. Those who believe in lack of respect to living authors (at least) can take scissors to all the quotes, combining one writer's subject with another's predicate.

The possibilities, while not strictly endless, do exceed the number of molecules in the universe.

Hypertet Fiction Demonstration. Friday evening. You've read about it in *The New York Times*, *The New York Review of Science Fiction*, and maybe even in *Wired*. It's hypertext fiction, and despite all your reading you still haven't the slightest idea what it looks like or how it works. Readercon, in an effort to explore new literary frontiers banish reader confusion, and hype more good writers, will answer all your hyper questions with a demonstration of e-fiction.

In an informal non-panel setting, e-fiction writers will demonstrate some of their texts, the Storyspace authoring system, and might possibly invite some hands-on story navigating.

The Ursula K. Le Guin Hour. Saturday evening. A speech and an interview conducted by Pat Murphy.

The James Tiptree, Jr. Award Ceremony. Saturday, after dinner.

An Interview with Terri Windling. Immediately following the award ceremony.

The Eighth Kirk Poland Memorial Bad Prose Competition. Soon after the Windling hour. In memory, of course, of the pen name and alter ego of Jonathan Herovit of Barry Malzberg's *Herovit's World*. Ringleader Craig Shaw Gardner reads a passage of genuine bad sf prose — which has been bifurcated in mid-sentence. It is not identified. Each of our panelists — Craig, six-time and current champion Geary Gravel, one-time champion Rosemary Kirstein, new challenger Rachel Pollack, and co-moderator Eric M. Van — then reads an ending for the passage. One ending is genuine; the others are imposters concocted by our contestants (including Craig). No one up there knows who wrote any passage other than their own — except for Eric, who knows all, a reward he receives for the truly painful duty of finding all these turkeys. Craig asks the audience to vote, by show of hands, for the passage they feel is real (he recaps the contenders by quoting a few pithy phrases from each, and the legendary Readercon Redshirts count them faster than you can say "terrible-terrible, awful-awful").

Eric then reveals the often shocking truth (we've found truly bad stuff from some sainted names as well as the usual tainted ones). Each writer receives a point for each audience member they fool, while the audience scores a collective point for every member who spots the real answer. The goal of the audience: to finish better than third (it's been years now.) Our goal: to find stuff so unbelievably bad they'll finish fourth. Serious warning: this event is medically inadvisable for those recovering from fractured ribs, pulled stomach muscles, or the like who are not also masochists (i.e., if it hurts to laugh, you're in trouble). Serious plug: we believe this is the best attended regular event, measured proportionally, at any sf convention.

CRAZEMAKER!!

The Game of Recombinant SF

A new diversion for fans *and* pros from the creator of the Kirk Poland Bad Prose Competition

If one wished to be facile, one could regard cyberpunk as nothing more than a formulaic construction, with four components: a cutting-edge technology which will profoundly effect our lives (cyberspace), a social or economic trend (multinationalism), a favorite writer from outside the genre (Raymond Chandler), and a pop culture icon (Lou Reed). Well, Readercon weekend we want to be facile. Trust me.

Friday night after the Meet the Pros(e) Party, we'll gather around four buckets filled with cardboard tokens. Each contestant (individual or team) will pick one color-coded token from each bucket. On these tokens they will find written—you guessed it—one technology, one social trend, one writer, one pop star. Just like William Gibson, each contestant must concoct, from these four ingredients, the next big sf subgenre. They must outline the novel which will define it, and explain how it gets its inevitable catchy name. Sometime Sunday we'll meet again and see whose craze is best.

An example. Imagine you pick these:

Cutting edge technology: Pocket cellular phones/PDAs
Social or economic trend: Increasing inner-city crime
Favorite writer from outside the genre: Gertrude Stein
Pop culture icon: Howdy Doody.

Okay, this set poses some difficulty. That's where the fun part comes in. Tokens may be traded, and trades may include any other consideration, such as money or things we don't want to know about. (We will provide lists of all the tokens in play; smart contestants will use them to make note of who draws what at the outset, and Devise a Strategy.) So imagine that after much wheeling and dealing, we've completely altered our hand:

Cutting edge technology: Drugs which alter personality
Social or economic trend: The growing conflict between the humanist left and the religious right
Favorite writer from outside the genre: Hunter S. Thompson
Pop culture icon: Barney.

Now this is more like it. When we arrive at the showdown Sunday, we bring . . .

Listening to Barniac

a novel outline by Eric M. Van

(and copyright 1994 by him lest the failure of his own powerful psychoactive medication makes him actually wish to write it)

In the near future, our gonzo first-person narrator takes us on a tour of the Bible Belt. In the guise of an itinerant preaching baker he brings his irresistibly delicious brownies to church bake sales in town after town. He makes sure that the minister and high church officials sample this delicious snack — because it is laced with Barniac, a powerful drug which semi-permanently alters the brain chemistry of those who ingest it. Barniac gradually turns the fierce and active love of these Bible Belters (we're gonna force you to love Jesus and thus save you from hell) into the all-encompassing, all-accepting love of Barney (I love you, you love me, do whatever you want), thus aborting their holy mission and, in effect, turning them into secular humanists.

But soon (in a sequence paying homage to Rick Deckard's similar crisis in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*) our man begins to doubt the moral rectitude of his undercover work. At last he breaks down and returns to his headquarters — BTV, actually a front for the humanists — and attempts to convince his superiors that they should cancel this entire program of covert ops. He has grown to love the Bible Belters, and wishes just to leave them alone. Knowing how thoroughly out of character this is for him, they subject him to a series of tests, which reveal the horrible, if unsurprising truth. Barniac can apparently be absorbed through the skin when handled in sufficient quantities, and while preparing his brownies our man has handled a megadose.

In a sequence paying homage to *Camp Concentration*, our hero, for a while, is happier and more loving and more accepting and more metaphorically big and purple than anyone has ever been before. We see this through his own eyes, in prose as hard to stomach as Disch's was to understand.

When the megadose inevitably wears off, he is still left with a dose. In a sequence paying homage to *A Clockwork Orange*, profound issues of free will and moral behavior are examined. His superiors, of course, wish to revert him to his previous state and have him continue his mission. But they are unwilling to use force or coercion to bring about this change: he must want it for himself. So they show him film footage of his pre-Barniac self, and explain patiently that his old personality would consider this new one to be worse than comatose. Yes, he says, but now he's *happy*. Why aren't they happy? He loves them. Don't they love him? And so on

He is unaware of the ramifications when they quite casually ask him, at last, if he's ever actually seen *Barney*. No, he hasn't. And so he finds himself in a room where the show is playing continually on four full-wall flat-screen TVs. For a while he is

merely fascinated, but after the third hour he finds himself unable to look away. He has become one with the dinosaur and the small children of varied racial origin: an authentic out-of-Barney experience.

Early on the second day he snaps, and in a sequence paying homage to Ridley Scott's famous Macintosh commercial, smashes all four screens with a large jar of salsa. When his bosses arrive moments later, he begs them for a new drug. One quick dose of Vidalium restores his brain chemistry to its natural state.

In a passage reminiscent of the ends of *Huck Finn*, *VALIS*, and hundreds of other books, our hero sets out once again on his quest. His task is not yet complete, but since no task ever is, we have enough closure to get by.

But not too much to preclude six or seven sequels.

In a mostly favorable review in the *NYRSF*, Bryan Cholfin claims the author belongs to "the Purple Prozac school of writing." Soon other critics are using the phrase to refer to similar novels. But the phrase is a long one, and the complex pun loses much out of context. Inevitably it is reduced to a single, colorful word, emblem of a movement whose existence is denied by all its supposed leaders (as is required by law). "You'll like this, it's real Purple."

Well, that wasn't too hard, was it? (Don't give me all the credit, because I'm not entitled: Bob Colby came up with "Crazemaker!" and Dave Shaw provided "Listening to Barniac." Thanks, guys!) Only two game details are undecided: how many contestants get to play, and the hour of the Sunday showdown. The number of contestants may be limited by either the number of sets of tokens we can think up, or by the number of entries we feel can be presented in an hour or 90 minutes.

If you'd like to play, please do this. Let us know with the reply coupon, and note the hours you expect to be available on Sunday. If you're gung ho, send us suggestions for the four categories. (Keep in mind that the first two categories are where we're likely to need the most help.) If we have to limit participation, we'll choose those who send us the most useful lists. When you arrive Friday at the con, you'll learn what time the showdown will take place, and what the time limit of your presentation (which doesn't necessarily have to be a straight reading of an outline) will be. Good luck!

Discussion Groups

If You've Never Been to One of These. We may offer a discussion group for neophytes Friday evening, Saturday morning, or both. Notice how the title begs the question as to what we are (sf convention or literary conference)!

The Man Who Mistook His Life for a Nap: True Tales of Neurochemistry. Eric M. Van. Readercon's own Program Chair Emeritus is a walking, talking (especially talking) Oliver Sachs essay ("I don't think anyone [else] has got what you've got" — his doctor). As sole proprietor of brain chemistry so outre it's given him the symptoms of most of the known sleep disorders and a few unknown ones, he'll tell a bunch of cool stories, and offer some uniquely informed speculation on sleep, mood, creativity, mental health, and bad hair days. (Highly recommended for friends of EMV, who fears he may otherwise spend the whole con answering the question "how are you?".)

Owners of Dysfunctional Book Collections: Bookaholics Anonymous Annual Meeting. Allegations continue about this most controversial of all 12-step groups. It has been suggested by some that despite the appearance of self-approration, despite the formal public proclamations by members that they find their behavior humiliating and intend to change it, this group in fact secretly encourages its members to succumb to their addiction. The shame, in other words, is a sham. Within the subtext of the members' pathetic testimony, it is claimed, all the worst vices are covertly endorsed: book-buying, book-hoarding, book-stacking, book-smelling, book-loving, even book-reading. Could this be true? Come and testify yourself. Then you tell us.

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Who's coming to Readercon 7? GOH's Ursula K. Le Guin and Terri Windling

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