

readercon 9

PROGRESS REPORT 2

Guests of Honor:

KIM STANLEY ROBINSON
ALGIS BUDRYS

Memorial Guest of Honor:
CYRIL M. KORNBLUTH

July 11-13, 1997

Marriott Westborough
5400 Computer Drive
Westborough, Massachusetts 01581
508-366-5511
Rooms: \$70 single/double

Notes from the Sofa

I first heard of Readercon 1 during the early planning stages, and it sounded wonderful: a whole weekend spent discussing books, with no extra diversions. Not long before the convention I joined the committee, and once it was over I started dragging friends to meetings, and, well, now you know how to become a con chair. Or at least a third of one—I'm sharing my duties with Ellen Brody and Merryl Gross, and we can't all fit on one chair—hence the sofa.

Welcome to Readercon 9. Our aim is to provide a place where readers and writers can meet, exchange ideas, and have fun.

As for me, I'm one of those weird people who like organizing things. If you are too, let me know—we can always use more committee members (and potential sofas). See you in July!

—Adina Adler

The Guests

As you might expect, Readercon Guests of Honor are something we give a lot of advance thought to. As far back as 1992, we knew we'd be asking Kim Stanley Robinson to be our GoH at about this time.

And then he published his Mars Trilogy.

Stan may well be the most versatile great writer the field has ever known, a world traveler with a command of science and history and a passionate interest in society and its structures to go with his Ph.D. in English. It is perilous to attempt to total his award history without a degree in higher mathematics: I come up with *twenty* Hugo and Nebula nominations, ten of each, for fourteen different works. *Red Mars* ('93) won the Nebula (and was a '92 Hugo nominee and the Arthur C. Clarke runner-up), while *Green Mars* won the '93 Hugo and Locus Awards (and

was a Nebula nominee). *Pacific Edge*, the last volume of his Three Californias trilogy, won the '91 John W. Campbell Memorial Award; the earlier volumes, *The Wild Shore* and *The Gold Coast* ('88), were runners-up for the Philip K. Dick and Campbell awards respectively. "Black Air" won the '83 World Fantasy Award for novella, "The Blind Geometer" won the '86 Nebula for novella, and *A Short Sharp Shock* won the '91 Locus Award for novella.

Stan was at Readercon 3, where he appeared to enjoy himself (to put it mildly). Indeed, he's been a faithful, even zealous proselytizer for us to his friends in the sf community, but since he moved from the East Coast back to his native California soon after the con, he hasn't been able to make it back himself. So his presence among us in July will be something special, a reunion, community. We hope you'll join us.

—Eric M. Van

I first met Algis Budrys at his kaffeeklatsch at Readercon 6 in 1993, but I can't remember when I first encountered his work because it seems like he has always been here. He has been a quietly important presence in speculative fiction since the 1950s, and is currently the editor/publisher of *tomorrow'sf*, electronically available at <http://www.tomorrow'sf.com/>. (The magazine was produced on paper for the first 24 issues, and was previously known as *Tomorrow Speculative Fiction*. I identified his car in the parking lot at Readercon 8, because the license plate read UNIFONT, the name of the publishing company.)

AJ is the author of eight novels, the best known being *Rogue Moon* (1960, Fawcett/Avon), a Hugo finalist selected for inclusion in *Science Fiction: The 100 Best Novels*. His short fiction has appeared in numerous collections, anthologies and

magazines. I think he has been even more influential as an editor, teacher and book reviewer. He has edited a great deal of speculative fiction and other genres, was a visiting writer at Clarion and taught writing workshops at the Library of Congress and many other places, and reviewed books for *Galaxy* and *Fantasy and Science Fiction* magazines. He was also the director of the Writers of the Future program and edited eight annual volumes of *L. Ron Hubbard Presents Writers of the Future* for Bridge (1985-1992).

Gracious and friendly people like AJ and his wife, Edna, make possible the meeting of readers and writers that is one of the hallmarks of Readercon. His participation in previous Readercons makes me feel like we are honoring one of our own.

—Ellen Brody

C.M. Kornbluth (1923-1958) had a short yet remarkable career. A member of the Futurians in the late 1930s, Kornbluth is perhaps best known for *The Space Merchants*, a biting satirical collaboration with Frederik Pohl in which Earth is controlled by advertising agencies. He also wrote other novels with Pohl, several with Judith Merril, and a number on his own. His short stories are frequently reprinted, particularly "The Marching Morons" and "The Little Black Bag" (both based on the premise that we are breeding intelligence out of the human gene pool). Kornbluth was a writer of dark humor and remarkable versatility, and we will be examining his career in several panels and events this year.

—Brian Youmans

The Program

The Program is the motive for Readercon, as well as the means and opportunity. We try to make it original, interesting, and thought-provoking. You'll see our preliminary list of panels on pages 3 & 4; please note that not all of these will make it onto the final schedule, and some may change.

Special Events

Friday evening is our Meet the Pros(e) Party, where you get to meet the writers and their writing, and commit Art. (Confused? Come to the party and find out!) Late Saturday afternoon we'll have interviews of our Guests of Honor; and after a dinner break we'll have an all-new Kirk Poland Memorial Bad Prose Competition.

A (Tentative) Schedule

Friday:	Program	6:00 PM to 10:00 PM
	Registration	4:00 PM to 9:00 PM
	Bookshop	4:00 PM to 9:00 PM
Saturday:	Program	10:00 AM to 9:30 PM (w/breaks)
	Registration	9:00 AM to 6:00 PM
	Bookshop	10:00 AM to 6:00 PM
Sunday:	Program	10:00 AM to 5:00 PM
	Registration	10:00 AM to Noon
	Bookshop	10:00 AM to 4:00 PM

Banquet

Last year's Banquet with discussion groups was very well received, so this year we'll be doing the same thing. We'll have a list of topics at Readercon Sales (along with tickets). You'll be asked to choose several topics in case your favorite fills up.

Banquet tickets will cost \$17. We'll be having a buffet with New England-style food outside on the patio (unless there's another hurricane). More details will be available at-con.

Our current list of discussion topics includes: Algis Budrys, Kim Stanley Robinson, C.M. Kornbluth, bookaholics, obscure Philip K. Dick novels, alternate histories, and horror without

vampires. Feel free to suggest more—send email to aadler@kinesisinc.com, or regular mail to our post office box.

Kaffeeklatsches

Kaffeeklatsches are small gatherings of a pro and some fans, chatting in an informal group. Since seating is limited, we ask that people wanting to attend sign up at the Information table. The schedule will be included in the Program Guide.

Chautauquas

Chautauquas are a revival of the popular Victorian lecture society at Chautauqua Lake in western New York. Each lecturer will discourse upon a favorite topic. Lectures will be based on the speaker's serious research for writing or personal interest, and the subject could be almost anything. Topics at Readercon 7 included the native New England vampire belief and Qabala as magical landscape. Come enjoy learning something new, from people who know far too much!

Publications

Our Program Guide contains the full conference schedule with panel précis and an index of each participant's appearances, plus a wide variety of useful information. In the back there are mini-bio-bibliographies of every participant. There will also be a simple pocket schedule in table form.

Our Souvenir 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 Tiptree Award Bake Sale

Readercon joins other conventions across the country in raising funds for this 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 Diane Kurilecz at 617-926-1885 or send email to readercon9@aol.com

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.

Writers' Workshop

Once again we'll be hosting a three-hour writers' workshop for a few amateurs or new pros, led by David Alexander Smith. It will happen on Sunday morning. To enroll, submit up to 7,500 words of fiction (self-contained short story, chapters from a novel, or an outline) by June 30 directly to David at: 112 Avon Hill Street, Cambridge, MA 02140.

For more information, write to David or call him at 617-661-3223.

The Bookshop

The Bookshop is our dealers' room. Expect a varied selection of new and used books and magazines from small and large publishers. There may still be a couple of tables available. If you're interested, contact us immediately.

Our Hotel

We return to the Marriott Westborough for a second year with a better idea of how to use the space. Note: Please make your reservations early—there is a chance that our room block will fill up. Mention Readercon when making reservations, and remember, when you're budgeting, that 9.7% Massachusetts hotel tax will be added to your bill.

The Panels

Landscape as character.

In certain fiction, the landscape plays such a prominent role that it nearly must be regarded as a major character. This is an element that cuts across genre, important in the western as well as in sf. How does this use of landscape differ among genres? What are the risks and advantages to giving the landscape such a prominent role, and what are the techniques of doing so successfully?

Reality and dream in fiction.

"It seems almost like a dream that has slowly faded." "Not to me," said Frodo. "To me it seems more like falling asleep again." Some books create a world so engaging and convincing it seems more real than reality. Others (e.g. Gene Wolfe's *There Are Doors*) seem like dreams from which we awaken. What elements in fiction create these disparate effects? Are they mutually exclusive?

Happily ever after.

Happy families may all be alike, but happy endings are not—some are definitely more satisfying than others. To what extent must a happy ending be earned? How does an author make the ending appropriate to the book (or is it the other way around)?

History and fictional history.

Certain things in fiction are, by convention and for good reason, not strictly realistic—dialogue, for instance, is a highly edited version of real speech. Is history one of these things? When we devise a fictional history (either an alternate past or a history of the future), can and should it represent the way history really works (choose your own theory), or is doing so antithetical to good fiction? Isn't the dramatic structure we look for in most novels absent from real history?

Saturday morning live: other early influences.

In past panels we've explored the influence of both our early reading and early life experiences on our fiction. We thought that covered it, but what about Astroboy, Rocky and Bullwinkle, the Legion of Superheroes, or Mr. Machine? For many of us, our first exposure to the genre came from cartoons, comic books, or even toys. A possibly nostalgic look back.

The year's best sf short fiction.

Editors compare the contents of Year's Best anthologies.

Tea for three (or four, or five...): marriage in f&sf.

Imaginative literature is a wonderful venue for exploring alternate formal or official relationships among partners. It's hard to resist the opportunity to write about power, economics, sex, love, various genders and aliens. What are the trends and where is the literature headed? Unlike most issues that sf has explored, however, there has been almost no normative change in the real world. Has this stasis affected fiction?

Out of print but not forgotten.

Grania Davis has informally instituted the Avram Davidson Award for the genre book which most deserves or needs to be back in print. This seems like a good excuse to discuss a favorite topic.

Books you just missed.

Our panelists recommend recent books (i.e. those probably still available new from the dealers in the Bookshop) that have been overlooked or neglected.

The career of Algis Budrys.

Werhumans: transformation as theme.

It is very common in fantasy and science fantasy for humans to transform themselves into animals, but what about the reverse? In *The Last Unicorn*, the title character is for a time transformed into a human, and is terrified by the loss of her essential nature. What are the uses of animal-to-humanoid transformation and to what extent can we find this theme going back through the history of these genres?

How march the morons?: satiric sf.

We recently overheard someone opine that the awful warning satirically inherent in C.M. Kornbluth's "The Marching Morons" had proven to be unwarranted. Funny, we had just been thinking exactly the opposite. And while there's no evidence that the average I.Q. has dropped significantly, something in Kornbluth's masterpiece rings true today. Sf satire frequently lampoons things which haven't happened yet, and which may come "true" in ways unforeseen by the writer and contemporary readers. Kornbluth anticipated the "dumbing down" of America (i.e., the decline not in intelligence but in knowledge), but he got all the details wrong. Our panelists will discuss sf satire, beginning with this story.

The Moon is no one's mistress anymore.

There was a time when the Moon and Mars were both special settings for sf. But the recent resurgence of fictional interest in the Red Planet has not been matched by any similar boom in lunar fiction. Is there simply a "been there, done that" element intrinsic to sf? Or has Mars proven to be a genuinely more interesting place? Will the recent discovery of frozen water at the moon's South Pole help even the score?

Nanotechnology and Clarke's law.

When Arthur C. Clarke wrote that "any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic," he anticipated by thirty or forty years the explosion of stories using nanotechnology. To what extent has nanotechnology become a catch-all explanation for devices that border on the magical? What techniques can be used to maintain a hard-sf feel in a story with such miraculous gizmos?

Updating your "real year."

In the Jan. '91 *New York Review of Science Fiction*, John Clute posits that every sf text, regardless of the year it claims to be set in, has an underlying "real year" which shines through, the secret point in time that gives the work its flavor. The closer the "real year" is to the present, the more cutting-edge the fiction reads; but most authors have a characteristic real year, one often based upon key childhood or adolescent experience and concerns. Is it possible to forcibly update your real year, in order to write sharper fiction? Doesn't the real year actually have two different elements, a scientific/technological one and a social/cultural one, differently amenable to updating and requiring different revision techniques?

The science fiction of Kim Stanley Robinson.

The science fiction of Cyril M. Kornbluth.

The two worlds of fantasy.

There is a large body of fantasy fiction which can be regarded and marketed equally well as young adult/children's fiction or as adult fiction. Is this phenomenon unique to fantasy, or just more common to it? What makes a book work in both worlds? Are the best examples of this genre designed for both children and adults? Does everyone get the same thing from these books, and if so, why the distinction between them?

The emotional palette of horror.

Terror and horror are not quite the same thing, and they just scratch the surface of the emotions the horror writer can choose to elicit. There's also creepiness, spookiness, apprehension, and disgust, for starters. We will look at some classic and contemporary horror fiction in terms of the emotions they favor. Is it possible for horror writers to wield conscious control over these different effects, evoking one or another as deemed appropriate?

The techno-thriller.

Another in a series of panels exploring genres tangential to sf proper. To what extent is the distinction between the techno-thriller and sf just a marketing one? Are some techno-thrillers closer to sf than others? Does that necessarily make them better, or even more interesting to sf readers? Includes a survey of the field.

Mystery fiction for sf readers.

Certain elements which occur often in mystery fiction have an intrinsic appeal to readers of speculative fiction. Examples include the use of cultures foreign to the reader and/or protagonist (e.g. the novels of Tony Hillerman), and the use of conceptual breakthrough structures, in which layers of corruption or deceit are peeled away, each bringing with it a complete re-ordering of reality (e.g. Dashiell Hammet's *Red Harvest*). Using these insights, can we identify which mystery writers will be most enjoyed by sf readers?

Hypertext: not missing what's missing.

Certain elements of fiction which might be regarded as central to reader satisfaction are essentially absent from hypertext, most obviously the old Aristotelian curve of rising interest and the sense of closure we get when we reach the end. What takes their place, or how are they transformed, in a successful hypertext? Are there fundamentally different solutions to this problem—is there just one hypertextual reading experience, or are we actually dealing with multiple media?

Driven to tears.

Most of us are moved literally to tears (or other intense emotional reaction) by the books we read. But by which parts of which books? Many a Tolkien devotee, for instance, will admit to crying at the end, but which page—which paragraph, even—is the one that gets you every time? It's different for everyone and potentially very revealing.

Rereading.

Why do we reread some books but not others? How is the rereading experience different from the initial one? How does it differ depending on how thoroughly we remember the text? Why do we want to revisit specific stories?

Critical theory: means or end?

A lot of highly intelligent readers seem to get along without knowing any critical theory. Doesn't this suggest that knowing theory may not be necessary to understanding fiction? Do we practice critical theory because it makes us better readers, or just because we like to exercise our brains that way? How does knowing theory affect the experience of reading fiction?

Critical theory: one or many?

Some readers adopt a single critical approach to literature and then apply it to everything they read. But one can argue that Darko Suvin's Marxist analysis of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* is just plain wrong—in fact, really stupid. This implies that different books are variously subject to analysis by

different approaches or theories. Is it possible to learn a variety of approaches, and to use the right one with each new book? Or are we better off mastering a single approach, and risking the occasional misprision?

Treating films and comics as text.

It's the latest rage in academia: literature doesn't have to be written and read. Films and comics can be regarded as texts, and subjected to the same sort of analyses as written literature.

Bookaholics Anonymous Annual Meeting.

In previous panels, many have admitted that being a bookaholic can actually be a good thing. But no matter how much you love book ownership, reading remains the best part of the book experience. Please write and tell us what you would like to testify about this year.

Fiction as alternate personal history.

Often, when we write fiction, we are writing alternate versions of our own lives. This may be less obvious in f&sf, but is it any less true? To what extent is this conscious or unconscious?

Sympathy for the doubtful.

Sometimes our protagonists have potentially dislikable personality traits, e.g. Bron in *Trouble on Triton*, Severian in *The Book of the New Sun*. How do you create the necessary reader sympathy for (or identification with) a character whom we might not even want as a friend?

My version of X.

Sometimes the genesis of a novel is no more complicated than "it's my version of _____." (Two classic examples are Brian Aldiss's *Non-Stop*, his version of Heinlein's *Orphans of the Sky*, and *The Forever War*, Joe Haldeman's version of *Starship Troopers*.) Writers who've used this shortcut will share their experiences, and discuss the special challenges and advantages of this approach.

Work and play: inspiration vs. execution.

In the production of a new work, what is the core of the writing process? Is it hitting upon original ideas, doing the research, the actual wordsmithing, revising the manuscript, or lurching with editors? Which aspects of the creative process most engage and challenge each writer? Which of these are fun and which work? Do different attitudes stem from different approaches? Are there learnable techniques to make the work parts more fun? What turns a good idea into good writing?

Explicit and implicit.

Writing is what you don't say as much as what you say. Are there rules of thumb for what one ought to leave out, and what one must include? (You'd have a fat chance of winning the best novel Hugo if you left out the protagonist's name, but the Nebula—no problem.)

The influence of magazine editors.

Once upon a time John W. Campbell was arguably the most influential person in the entire field. How much influence do magazine editors have today? Why have things changed?

The declining sf readership.

Readership of speculative fiction is in decline. Actually, readership of just about everything is in decline. Is sf suffering more, because its special appeal is being uniquely met by the media? If this is so, does it also provide unique opportunities to reverse the trend? How could we do this?

The Con Suite

The Con Suite is Readercon's own party, with lots of munchies and people to talk to. Our new location is a big comfy suite on the hotel's fourth floor. We try to keep it open as much as possible (with a little help from volunteers).

Volunteering

Readercon is run entirely by volunteers. We can always use more help, and volunteering is a great way to meet people. Let us know you're interested on the form below, and we'll contact you about being scheduled in the areas you'd like to work—or you can just volunteer at the con. Work enough hours and you'll earn some cool thing or other.

His Share of Glory

The Complete Short SF of C.M. Kornbluth

This volume contains all the short works written exclusively by C.M. Kornbluth. Included are "classics" of SF, such as "The Marching Morons," "Shark Ship," and "The Cosmic Charge Account." Also included are rare early works never before reprinted. Hardcover, 670 pp. \$27.

[The stories in this volume] ... offer a glowing, nostalgic browse for Kornbluth fans from way back, and an excellent opportunity for new generations to discover just how good a storyteller he [Kornbluth] was.—*Kirkus Reviews*

Available at the NESFA sales table in the Bookshop or by mail from: NESFA Press, PO Box 809, Framingham, MA 01701. Please add \$2 for postage in the US, \$4 for foreign orders. Visit our web site <<http://www.nesfa.org>> for more info.

Membership

You're getting this Progress Report either because you've already bought a membership in Readercon 9—your mailing label says "(member)"—or because you're on our mailing list. If you need to buy a membership, you can do so by filling out the form below and sending us a check. At-the-door memberships will cost \$50. If you've already bought a membership but find you cannot attend, you may transfer your membership to another person. We can't honor requests for refunds. We ask that you notify us of the transfer to eliminate confusion at registration. Either drop us a line at our post office box or email your notification to zeno@mit.edu

(Some) Policies

- No smoking in programming areas or the Bookshop.
- Only guide animals in convention areas.

Mail this to:

Readercon, PO BOX 381246, CAMBRIDGE MA 02238

Enclosed is \$_____ for the following:

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_____ Attending membership(s) (\$40 each, until July 1, 1997)

_____ Supporting membership(s) (\$10 each, includes all publications)

_____ Banquet ticket(s) (\$17 each. Please don't send after July 1—it may not reach us in time)

() I would like to organize a discussion group or workshop.

() Please send _____ Volunteer info _____ Bookshop info

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Make your check or money order (in U.S. funds only) out to READERCON. Please don't send cash through the mail.

- No weapons in convention areas.
- Young children who are always with an adult are admitted for free; others need a membership. Readercon does not have children's programming.

Babysitting

Readercon does not have an official babysitting service, due to costs and liability issues. However, there will be a cooperative group of parents trading off time and children. Interested? Contact Louise Waugh, ljwaugh1@aol.com, or contact Readercon by telephone or mail.

Getting There

By Car

From Boston: Massachusetts Turnpike (I-90) West to 495 North (exit 11A) to 9 West (exit 23B) to Computer Drive (first exit). Bear right to hotel.

From Worcester: Route 9 East to Computer Drive. Three rights then 1/2 mile straight to the hotel.

From Sturbridge: Massachusetts Turnpike (I-90) East to 495 North (exit 11A) to 9 West (exit 23B) to Computer Drive (first exit). Bear right to hotel.

From 495 North or South: 495 to Route 9 West (Exit 23B) to Computer Drive (first exit). Bear right to hotel.

From New York or New Jersey Turnpike: 95 North to 91 North (New Haven, CT) to 84 East (Hartford, CT) to Massachusetts Turnpike (I-90) East to 495 North (exit 11A) to 9 West (exit 23B) to Computer Drive (first exit). Bear right to hotel.

From New Hampshire: 93 South to 495 South to Route 9 West (exit 23B) to Computer Drive (first exit). Bear right to hotel.

From Rhode Island: 95 North to 495 North to Route 9 West (exit 23B) to Computer Drive (first exit). Bear right to hotel.

By Limousine

The Marlborough-Westborough Shuttle provides limousine service from Logan Airport and downtown Boston. They may be reached by phone at 800-242-0064 or 508-481-7300. The price is \$24 for adults. Vans run every 45 minutes from 6:15 AM to 10:45 PM seven days a week. Reservations are required. Special trips can be arranged for groups arriving on the same flight.

By Bus

Peter Pan Bus Lines provides local service to Westborough from Boston and Worcester every 2 hours. One bus a day in each direction stops directly at the Marriott. Call 800-343-9999 for details of schedule and ticket price.

Who's coming to readercon 9?

GoH's Algis Budrys and Kim Stanley Robinson

The Joey Zone • Ann Tonsor Zeddies • Stanley Wiater • Jeff VanderMeer
Gordon Van Gelder • Jean-Louis Trudel • Cecilia Tan • Susanna J. Sturgis
Jennifer K. Stevenson • Allen M. Steele • Sarah Smith • David Alexander Smith
Cortney Skinner • Delia Sherman • Darrell Schweitzer • Felicity Savage
Jasmine Sailing • Charles C. Ryan • Paul T. Riddell • Mark Rich • Katya Reimann
Charles Platt • Paul Park • Rebecca Ore • Lance Olsen • Charles Oberndorf
John Morressy • Yves Meynard • Ed Meskys • Edward McFadden • Joseph Mayhew
Laurie Marks • Barry Malzberg • Gregory Maguire • Shariann Lewitt
Jonathan Lethem • Fred Lerner • Warren Lapine • Lissanne Lake • Ellen Kushner
Rosemary Kirstein • Robert Killheffer • Angela Kessler • Ann Kennedy
Michael Kandel • Alexander Jablokov • Ken Houghton • Connie Hirsch • Jeff Hecht
Daniel Hatch • David G. Hartwell • Nancy C. Hanger • Elizabeth Hand
Leigh Grossman • Geary Gravel • Glenn Grant • Greer Gilman • Craig Shaw Gardner
Esther M. Friesner • Lise Eisenberg • Scott Edelman • Thomas A. Easton
Andy Duncan • Paul Di Filippo • Daniel P. Dern • Ellen Datlow • Shira Daemon
Don D'Amassa • Kathryn Cramer • F. Brett Cox • John Clute • Hal Clement
Jeffrey A. Carver • Michael A. Burstein • Stephen P. Brown • Richard Bowes
Eluki Bes Shahar • Ellen Asher • Catherine Asaro • Eleanor Arnason

...and more to come!

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