

Windycon XXIX
A convention report by Evelyn C. Leeper
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This will be, one presumes, a slightly different sort of con report, since this time Mark and I are Fan Guests of Honor. Lest you worry, this does not mean I will be more forgiving of what I might see as problems, but it does mean that I will be seeing the convention differently.

For one thing, I seem to have been scheduled for four panels, an interview, and a (short) speech, all in two-and-a-half days. This is a higher level of activity that I usually have--luckily coffee exists. (At the Toronto International Film Festival this year, we saw five films a day, and I had to do it without coffee, since I was trying to purge my body of caffeine before fasting immediately after it for Yom Kippur. Cutting out both caffeine and food simultaneously is what gives one the pounding headaches often associated with that holiday.)

But because almost all the panels I will be going to are ones I am on, it will be harder to write up lengthy descriptions of them. (It's hard to take complete notes and actually participate in a panel at the same time.)

We had decided that if we were going to travel to Chicago, we should take advantage of the chance to do a bit of sight-seeing, so we arranged to fly in two days early, giving us two-and-a-half days before we needed to meet with the committee Thursday night.

The convention was at the Hyatt Regency Woodfield, which is in Schaumburg. (I guess "Hyatt Regency Woodfield" sounds better than "Hyatt Regency Schaumburg.") This is not actually in, or even very near, Chicago, but it is relatively close to a commuter train line, so we decided not to rent a car, and use public transportation in and out of the city.

The conclusion I drew, however, was that no matter what method one uses, Chicago is expensive to get around. If you stay *in* Chicago, the hotel is expensive. If you stay outside and rent a car, the car, gas, and parking in the city is expensive. If you stay outside and don't rent a car, the taxis in the suburbs are expensive. However, the train into and out of the city is very reasonable--less than half the cost of an equivalent distance outside of New York City.

Pre-Con Sightseeing

Tuesday we got in around 2:00PM, but since the Art Institute was open until 8:00PM, we decided to go in to Chicago that day. We wondered if we would get to see Ivan Albright's "Dorian Gray" (as used in the 1945 "Picture of Dorian Gray"), but that was still in storage. However, we did see two other Albright paintings which we hadn't see before, and all his stuff has that same grotesque element. We also saw Edward Hopper's "Nighthawks", which is much less known than the famous pastiche, "Boulevard of Lost Dreams" (which uses Clark Cable, James Dean, Elvis Presley, and Marilyn Monroe instead of the anonymous figures in Hopper's painting). One wonders how Hopper (or his descendents) feels about this state of affairs.

We had only about three hours at the Institute by the time we had taken a taxi, the train, and a bus with a transfer to the El. Still that was enough time to see many of the galleries and highlights. And as it turned out, we were glad to have gone in this day.

Dinner was at Miller's Pub on Wabash where we had transferred from the bus to the El. Their specialty was ribs, but they also had Hungarian goulash, which Mark likes, so we compromised with my ordering a slab of ribs and giving a few to Mark. (Since this was the first meal we had had since breakfast, we were pretty hungry.)

Wednesday we went to the Field Museum of Natural History, where the main new feature since our last visit was Sue. We also saw the Tsavo lions again, as featured in "The Ghost and the Darkness" (which was mentioned on the exhibit), and "Bwana Devil" (which was not). Other exhibits in the African mammals area included the aardvark, an incredibly strange-looking animal when you think about it, the buffalo (whose horns look like a woman's hat to me), and the hyenas (which seem to be sometimes feline and sometimes canine).

We went through a new exhibit aimed at a younger audience, titled "What Is an Animal?" By their definition at the beginning, an animal is heterogamous, forms a blastula, is multi-cellular, is heterotrophic, and is motile for at least some of its life. However, later the exhibit later claimed some animals have asexual reproduction through fission, which violates the first two conditions.

The Art Institute had some canopic jars, but they also seemed to be human-headed. Here, the canopic jars had the differing heads: Dua-mut-ef or the jackal (held the stomach), Im-sety or the human (liver), Hapy or the baboon (lungs), and Qbeh-senu-ef or falcon (intestines). (I think there should have been a fifth, but I'm not sure.) This area also had some cartoon-like drawings which they implied came from actual bas-reliefs, but also seemed to be fictionalized, with conversation word balloons. Nothing indicated which was the case.

In the Sue exhibit, they had a statement that: "Facts are things we know are true because we can

- | see, smell, hear, taste, or touch them;
- | measure them;
- | manipulate them;
- | and show them to others."

If this is supposed to be a definition of "fact," I'm sure a lot of philosophers would disagree. For example, Descartes began by concluding that the only thing he knew was true was "Cogito ergo sum" ("I think, therefore I am"), and this doesn't meet *any* of the requirements.

There was a brief discussion of cladistics (phylogenetic systematics, which says that all classifications should be based on blood relationships, and every named group should be a clade, or a group descended from a common ancestor). But the entire "Life Over Time" section was based on the traditional museum layout of chronological time rather than cladistic relationships. Cladistics has a

"Law of Parsimony" which is similar to Occam's Razor. This Law of Parsimony states that whatever set of relationships requires the fewest additions or losses of characteristics should be used. So, if you have entities X, Y, and Z such that X has characteristic A, Y has A, B and C, and Z has A and C, one constructs a tree where some X acquire C, resulting in Z, then some Z acquire B, resulting in Y. (Rather than X acquiring B, becoming X', and then X and X' both acquiring C, resulting in Y and Z.)

Visually, they portrayed clades as boxes within boxes rather than a sequence of boxes.

They talked about synapsids as "mammal-like reptiles," even though this seems a bit anachronistic. They say that pelycosaurs and mammals share in common having only one hole behind the eye socket. Of course, they also claim mammals have hairy skin and mammary glands, while I thought the current definition was that mammals have three bones in the inner ear, because there are actually mammals lacking hair (whales and dolphins) or mammary glands (the duck-billed platypus).

The section on pachyderms showed that Asian elephants (*Elephas*) and mammoths (*Mammuthus*) form a clade; that and African elephants (*Loxodonta*) form a larger clade; and those, along with *Pimelephas*, *Stegodon*, and mastodon (mammut) form a still larger clade. So Asian elephants are more closely related to mammoths than to African elephants, regardless of how many Tarzan movies stuck large fake ears on Asian elephants.

We ate dinner at Miller's again. One odd feature of the Chicago Transit system is that transfers are good for two hours from purchase, so we could take the bus back to downtown, get off, eat dinner, and then get on another bus to the train station.

We had planned to go in on Thursday to see the Museum of Science and Industry, but several people said that the museums might be crowded or closed or picketed or something because of the Transatlantic Trade [conference], and on the train they announced the station lower concourse would be closed after 10:45AM Thursday. So we decided to skip going in, which turned out to be a wise choice, as we got a message Thursday at the hotel during the day that the time of the Windycon dinner was changed from 7:00PM to 6:00PM. Had we gone into the city, we wouldn't have known and wouldn't have gotten back in time. [It also turned out that while all the disruptions due to preventative planning came off as planned, the problems they were planning about never materialized.]

So instead we relaxed Thursday, and spent a few hours at what is apparently Schaumburg's main attraction: Woodfield Mall. We're not big mall-goers, but it is interesting to walk through one every once in a while.

One change to malls over the last few years is that the bookstore staples of B. Dalton and Waldenbooks have changed. B. Dalton is pretty much gone, since it was bought by Barnes & Noble, which is now concentrating on superstores, sometimes at malls, but often free-standing. Waldenbooks seems still to be around, but not very good. This may be that they are now being compared to super-stores. And unlike in Singapore, one doesn't find used bookstores in malls.

I did notice that there were two movie-tie-in editions of A. E. E. Mason's "The Four Feathers". Pocket Books has photographs from the movie on the cover, while Tor Books had just "Now a major motion picture" and a much classier adventure-style painting--and at a lower price.

However, if there are fewer bookstores, there is great entertainment value in places like Brookstone. Where else would one see the "Ambient Orb," a wireless technology device that glows green when the stock market is up, red when it's down, and yellow when it's in-between? (Only \$200.) Or the "Park Smart"- -a \$20 electronic device into which you key your parking location and it displays it back to you? Or smart grill tools (for example, the fork has a built-in thermometer)? Or the auto-stir coffee mug, which for \$20 has a little X-shaped piece in the bottom that spins when you press a

button?

Someone later said that this was the country's second-largest mall, and a lot of people seemed to think it was a really great place to shop. I guess that Mark and I are just not shoppers, or mall-goers. We actually drove fairly near the Mall of America on our recent vacation out west, and never even considered the idea of going there. [Later we heard the clarification that in total space, Woodfield is smaller than Mall of America, but in retail space it is larger.]

Pre-Con Dinner

We returned to the hotel, and went down at 6:00PM for dinner. Well, it turned out the dinner wasn't until 7:00PM after all, so we helped with art show set-up for an hour (mostly holding vertical grids in place and cable-tying them together--Bill Roper had done all the layout to figure out where everything went). One minor problem seemed to be that the hotel had said how wide the room was but it was really two feet narrower. Luckily it wasn't such a tight fit that this couldn't be compensated for.

Then was the dinner for the committee and the Guests of Honor (and other guests). The Author Guest of Honor was Charles de Lint, the Artist Guest of Honor was Lisa Snellings, the Editor Guest of Honor was Shawna McCarthy (who happens to live only about fifteen miles from us in central New Jersey), and the Toastmaster was Bob Eggleton. Also present were Guests Frederik Pohl, Elizabeth Anne Hull, Glen Cook, and Charles Vess.

Being a Guest of Honor

For those wondering how the logistics/finances of being a Guest of Honor work, I can say that it depends on the convention. We were Fan Guests of Honor many years back at a convention in Michigan, and while some was the same, some was different. In both cases, the convention purchased the plane tickets and provided transportation to and from the airport at the convention end. For the earlier convention, I seem to remember that while we would be reimbursed for meals, there was always someone there from the convention to pick up the tab, so we never had to ask. And the hotel was paid for directly by the convention. For Windycon, they gave us a check for the hotel and a flat per diem for expenses, and we paid for everything directly. (Part of the difference may be the fact that lots more fans have credit cards now. They did say if we needed the check cashed to pay for the room, they could do that.)

The committee also sent a fruit basket, including a book titled "Chicago Stories" (not science fiction) and a box of Fannie May chocolates (which are made in Chicago).

I go through all this because it seems to be the sort of thing that people may wonder about but not want to ask. The per diem probably varies from convention to convention, but it's about what a business traveler might spend in a day, and is not some inflated amount which includes a speaker's fee or anything like that.

After breakfast Friday we went over to see if we could help with the rest of the art show set-up, but apparently 8:30AM was too early for such fannish activity--the room was locked and dark.

Registration

When we went over to the hotel desk to change the room over to our credit card from that of the Windycon place-holder one, we saw there were two flyers out on the hotel desk. One welcomed Windycon members and mentioned some changes and rules (like extended hours for the pool, and no storing beverages and ice in the bathtubs), and the other listed some specials in the restaurant for the weekend--a Saturday lunch hamburger special, a dinner buffet, and so on. This is a nice touch--at

Boskone I think some of this information may get lost in the general registration materials or restaurant guide.

The Pocket Program was a tri-fold 8.5x14 sheet with the program, hours for things like the art show and childcare, and the hotel map. The restaurant guide was in the Program Book (Souvenir Book) along with the usual articles by and about the Guests of Honor, descriptions of the program items, and other useful information. The map was less than completely helpful, but I suspect that most of the attendees are familiar with the area. While there were probably two dozen restaurants within a mile, it's not clear how many one could actually walk to.

Also handed out were a copy of "Realms of Fantasy" magazine (edited by Shawna McCarthy) and a CD of filk by various well-known area filkers. (I can't review that until I get home to a CD player.) The artwork for the badges and the Program Book cover were done by the Artist Guest of Honor, as is traditional.

My main complaint so far is that because smoking is allowed only in the lobby, where the Starbucks is, the Starbucks is full of people smoking. (That was where we had breakfast Thursday and Friday mornings, because while the coffee shop/restaurant was reasonable for lunch and dinner, it was \$5 for coffee at breakfast, and that was even more expensive than Starbucks.)

Friday morning we had breakfast and then I helped hang art mailed in by artists for the art show. My first panel wasn't until 4:00PM, so there was a lot of time to hang out and see people.

Beyond the Fields We Know
Friday, 4PM
Lisa Freitag, Evelyn Leeper, Mike Williamson

Description: "Travelers tell of the fantastic places they've visited, with one caveat. They're all real places but they would be right at home in fantasy novels."

As usual, my descriptions of panels when I am on them is considerably worse than when all I have to do is to take notes.

We had a wide range of opinions or attitudes. For example, asked what the most fantastical place/scene he had ever seen, Williamson said it would be a view of the Mississippi River Flood of 1993 from a helicopter. Freitag said for her it was either the Canyonlands in the evening, or perhaps Ayres Rock (Uluru) in Australia. I said I might agree about Australia, but that it was the sky rather than the ground. For that matter, any place that you can get away from light pollution and really see the night sky would qualify.

Williamson also named Picacho Peak, Arizona, and Flint Ridge, Ohio. Since I've never heard of them, I wonder if his conception of fantastical isn't different from the standard-- assuming there is a standard conception of "fantastical." I think, however, we all agreed that there are many fantastical places in Utah, even if we didn't necessarily agree on which ones.

Switching to "constructed places," Freitag thought that Venice had the look of a city from a fantasy novel, maybe Lankmar or something from Terry Pratchett. I suggested the Old City of Jerusalem, as well as the Temple of Karnak in Luxor. Williamson thought the Cahokia Mounds would qualify, but I said that for me, if I didn't know they were constructed and didn't already know something of their history, they wouldn't affect me at all. I said that Acoma, a Native American village built on top of a butte in Arizona, was certainly striking, though perhaps starker or plainer than most fantasy settings. A lot of famous ruins probably qualified in this category: Uxmal and Tulum in Mexico, the Pyramids in Egypt, Machu Picchu in Peru,

I'm not sure we had a very coherent panel or over-arching theme. We came up with a lot of random suggestions, most within the United States. While I would agree that the best/most dramatic/most fantastic scenery is in the United States, I think we gave somewhat short shrift to both ruins and to cities with "alien" atmospheres (such as Varanasi/Benares, India, sailing down the Ganges past the ghats with their burning funeral pyres).

Opening Ceremonies

And speaking of Benares....

We had been told that we should, or at least could, give a ten- minute speech at Opening Ceremonies. Mark began by saying that he had woken up at 3:00AM and decided he should talk about our experiences in Benares, because, he said, "That sort of thing seems like a really good idea at 3AM." But at some point later in the day he decided that people actually would probably want to get to parties sooner, so he suggested a deal: "I'll pretend I gave the speech; you pretend you were awed by it." Of all the speeches, this got the biggest round of applause.

Lisa Snellings talked about having just spent a while in the southwest desert and being happy to return to a place with leaves and colors in the scenery.

Bob Eggleton, the Toastmaster, said that he had just returned from Japan, where he got to be an extra in the latest Godzilla movie.

Shawna McCarthy said she knew she wouldn't have a chance to talk to everyone who would want to talk to an Editor Guest of Honor, so she would say ahead of time, "I'm sorry I didn't like your story. I understand, but I thought that story *was* fantasy. Yes, please keep sending me your stories." (And a list of more one-line replies that I failed to remember. It looks a little tacky to be up on the dais madly taking notes during the Opening Ceremonies. Also, we were *behind* the sound system speakers rather than in front of them so it wasn't always easy to understand.)

My speech was delivered somewhat modified from my original text, but since I have only the original text, you'll have to accept this as close enough:

First of all, I'd like to thank the Windycon 29 committee for inviting me/us to be Guests of Honor.

But I'm not sure exactly what they expected.

You see, media fans think I'm a fanzine fan, and fanzine fans think ... well, I don't know what they think, but not that I'm a fanzine fan.

Me? I'm just a fan.

I've been reading science fiction since "The Wonderful Flight to the Mushroom Planet", unless you want to count Dr. Seuss, in which case it's been almost fifty years. But I didn't read Heinlein juveniles until I was in college, I was reading Franz Werfel's "Star of the Unborn" in junior high, and my favorite "authors of the fantastic" are Jorge Luis Borges, Olaf Stapledon, and Mark Twain--not exactly your average choices.

I've been watching science fiction since "The Twilight Zone". But I never watched all the Saturday morning science fiction stuff. (I don't think we even got those networks in Bangor, Maine, or Rantoul, Illinois.) I did watch a lot of Roy Rogers, Rin Tin Tin, and Sky King.

I watched "Star Trek", but was never a Trekkie.

The first science fiction film I can remember watching was "Son of Frankenstein" on New Year's Eve 1963. The first science fiction film I saw in a theater could very well have been 2001-- which was also my second date with the utterly fascinating Mark Leeper. Loved the date, wasn't as thrilled with the movie. (I did see "The Ten Commandments" in a theater in 1956--does that count?)

I don't watch much SF on television these days. Buffy bores me, the new Twilight Zone seems aimed at people at least a generation younger than me, and everything else people have recommended to us seems even worse. Anime doesn't do much for me, though I do like Miyazaki's work.

People who hear I'm a science fiction fan ask if I read anything besides science fiction. My science fiction reading is only about a third of my pleasure reading--which in these days of retirement is my only kind of reading.

I read about technology, but I don't have a cell phone, a Tivo, or an in-house computer network. I don't blog, and barely know anything about it. I don't play video or computer games . . . well, okay, I do play solitaire.

I don't do costuming or filking. Well, I do sing in the shower, but you want me to keep it there.

I belong to no science fiction clubs or societies. I did belong to the science fiction club at Bell Labs, but that ended when we retired--the club as well as our membership in it.

All this is by way of saying that whatever a typical fan is, I'm not it.

Yet I'm still a fan.

These days it seems less clear what distinguishes a fan from a non-fan. Non-fans in the millions read speculative fiction (think "Harry Potter" and "Lord of the Rings"). Non-fans in the millions see speculative fiction movies (think "Harry Potter" and "Lord of the Rings"--or "Jurassic Park", "Independence Day", or "The Sixth Sense").

Speculative fiction--and even specifically science fiction-- permeates books, movies, television, games, art, graphic novels, and other areas.

In fact, probably all that's necessary is that I think I am a fan. Fandom is not a religion that requires some rite of conversion, some panel of initiates to declare you an authentic fan. Fannishness is something you self-declare. If you know enough about being a fan to formulate the thought, "I am a fan," then you're a fan. Maybe it's the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. (No, not that Worf. The other one.) Or maybe it goes back to Descartes. Just as Descartes realized that only a thinking being could formulate the thought, "I think," it seems to me that only a fan could formulate the thought "I think I am a fan."

So I propose a new fannish motto to add to "There Ain't No Such Thing As a Free Lunch" and "Fandom Is a Way of Life": "Clamo ergo clamorator." I think I am a fan, therefore I am.

End of speech.

Moebius Theater

The Opening Ceremonies were followed by the Moebius Theater, a group of about a half dozen people doing science fictional blackout skits. (If you don't recognize the term "blackout," it's from vaudeville and refers to short humorous skits that end with a punch line followed by the lights on stage going out.)

(Oh, before all this, we had dinner with Steven Silver at Joe's Crab Shack, which was right next to the hotel and had a good crawfish etouffe.)

The Heisenberg Principle and Suspension of Disbelief
Saturday, 10AM

Diane Blackwood, Toni Bogolub, Sherry Karp, Mark Leeper, Barry Lyn-Waitsman

Description: "Does it bother you when films take liberties with time travel, etc.? How much can a movie get away with if it's done well? Does this spoil the story elements of the film when it's done badly?"

Bogolub began by stating, "I can suspend disbelief when they get it wrong, but they have to get it wrong right." In other words, incorrect science has to be at least plausible. Blackwood seemed to agree when she said that what she dislikes is a "lack of logic."

Karp said that she tended to notice the biological aspects of getting wrong. Her two favorites are "buckets of blood and how fast you can cure a disease--or die from it." (Her complaint about the buckets of blood is that they would congeal very quickly and would not be liquid as they are always shown.) Lyn- Waitsman said his field was physics.

Leeper observed that what seems like bad science can turn out not to be. For example, he said, "The Invisible Boy" seemed like bad science in the 1970s, what with voice-activated computers and computers taking over other computers, but now seems pretty accurate. As he said, "It's amazing how wrong I was about how wrong it was."

Lyn-Waitsman said that "2001: A Space Odyssey" was a good example of a film that got it right, but that far too many science fiction films have characters outrunning fireballs, and so on. (I will note that this is also true of general action films, such as "The World Is Not Enough.") Films don't distinguish very well between comic book realities rather than science fiction realities.

Bogolub said that the "Back to the Future" films played with the ideas correctly, and incorporated changes in the past into the future.

Regarding time travel in general, Leeper said that it is among a list of impossibilities that occur frequently in science fiction films. These include faster-than-light travel, humanoid aliens, and aliens speaking English, in addition to time travel. Lyn- Waitsman added that in alien contact situations, we always seem to have translators and they don't, but we still understand what they are saying. Leeper noted that the use of English in "Planet of the Apes" (either film) ruins the surprise. (I'll note that its use in "Time Tunnel" is just plain silly.)

Someone cited Clarke's Law: "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." (And someone else quoted Benford's Rejoinder: "Any technology distinguishable from magic is insufficiently advanced.") So Karp asked, "How do we know these things aren't possible?" The answer seems to be that Clarke's Law applies to technology, but not to basic science, and that while we may be wrong about some things, it's not likely.

Lyn-Waitsman noted that even allowing for advanced technology, too many films violate their own logic. Bogolub later re- iterated this, saying that films should have at least internal logic.

Leeper said one of the things that seems to show up a lot is the idea that a certain level of radiation is deadly after ten hours, but perfectly safe at nine hours and fifty-nine minutes. (This is somewhat related to Karp's complaint of "how fast you can cure a disease--or die from it.")

Blackwood said that having a good plot and characters can overcome some problems. As an example

where this didn't happen, she cited the new "Time Machine", where the Eloi are not passive enough given their situation of being hunted and so on. (I haven't seen the film, so I can't quite picture what she meant.) Karp noted that living things are variable, and that "there are no real laws of behavior the way there are in physics." Karp also claimed that there would be sound in space because the source is vibrating, but I would think that you could only hear the sound if you were in contact with the source. Someone in the audience added that in films, while you hear all sorts of stuff in vacuum *outside* the ship, *inside* the ship you never hear the engines.

Lyn-Waitsman recommended the classic Larry Niven essay, "Man of Steel, Woman of Kleenex", and the Robert A. Heinlein story "Jerry Was a Man".

Leeper observed, "The universe, by and large, sticks to very simple rules."

I wonder if our reaction to science fiction films with bad science isn't that of someone who sees them as attacking their "religion," and the reaction much the same as Christians who might see inaccurate religious films. "But Jesus never changed water into malt whiskey!" Someone did mention that bad history in films gets a similar reaction from people who know history. Lyn-Waitsman said that history changes, or at least our understanding of what really happened, but I think what was being referred to was more the sort of thing one had in "Braveheart", where it was suggested that William Wallace was actually the father of the next King of England, when in fact that king wasn't born until five years after Wallace's death.

Leeper warned, "Accuracy is not the only virtue," saying that while the science in the original version of "The Fly" was bad, the film itself was good. Karp warned that we shouldn't expect science fiction films to educate people about science (or historical epics about history), saying, "The hopelessly ignorant are always ignorant."

Fan Guest of Honor Interview Saturday, 11AM

Description: "Fan GoH Evelyn Leeper interviews her husband, Fan GoH Mark Leeper. Who knows what new information Evelyn will learn about Mark?"

Well, hardly anyone learned anything. By 11AM, only two other people had shown up--and they were there by mistake. (They were intending to come to the 12 noon panel in the same room.) We ended up just talking to Jim Rittenhouse, who stayed around to keep us company. About halfway through, someone else did show up and we did a sort of mini-interview, but it was more chatting about our life in fandom than a real interview.

Living in a Two-Fan Family Saturday, 1:00PM Phyllis Eisenstein, Rachael Karp, Evelyn Leeper, Roland Oakes

As usual, my notes for a panel I am on are not up to a full report.

It was agreed that fannish marriages may be considered permanent when the weeding out of duplicate books is done.

People seemed to think that two-fan families (or rather, two-fan couples) were more likely than one-fan families (couples). Of the panelists, three were in two-fan couples; Karp was the daughter of a fannish couple. Most fannish couples seem to have started out independently as fans, though there are certainly cases in which a fan marries a non-fan, who then becomes a fan.

One topic that is possibly coming of age now for conventions is that of the *third*-generation fan.

("Gee, Grandpa, tell us about science fiction conventions when you were a boy.")

**De Lint Autographing
Saturday, 2PM**

I managed to get two De Lint books autographed, neither of which had he seen a lot of recently: "Berlin" and "The Wild Wood". The former is from a small press; the latter was a small book from Bantam with illustrations by Brian Froud.

**Magical Realism and Fantasy
Saturday, 4PM**

Evelyn Leeper, Stephen Leigh, Jody Lynn Nye, Katya Reimann, Mary Frances Zambreno

Description: "If it's from Latin America it's magical realism; if it's from New York or London it's fantasy. True or false? Panelists decide."

This was definitely the best panel I was on or attended, in part because everyone was prepared and there was a genuine topic here. (Of course, I tend to prefer the academic-type panels anyway.) I even managed to take halfway decent notes.

Zambreno introduced herself as an author of young adult novels (though not necessarily magical realist ones).

In our search for a definition and a distinction from fantasy, Reimann humorously suggested that "magical realism has cooking." (I note that this was humorously, because otherwise someone might take it seriously! At least I *think* it was humorous. . . .) Nye, more seriously, suggested that magical realism is where magic "doesn't interrupt" (that is, it is used as part of the scenery), and Reimann added that there is often a peasant orientation and a fertility element. She suggested that this implied an underlying desire to "reconnect to the soil," which almost made me wonder if golem studies aren't magical realism. However, Zambreno said later that magical realism is "resolutely secular," and should not be confused with religious fantasy. Nye agreed, saying that people are often uncomfortable with overt magic find magical realism acceptable. (This probably is also a factor of the backgrounding of the magic.)

Zambreno said other distinguishing features include fantastical family relationships, enigmas and puzzles, and an experimentation with techniques. (I wonder if the fact that Young Nehamkim is older than Old Nehamkim makes "Love and Death" magical realism?) Nye said that in addition, problems often stay unresolved, and the character definition tends to be weaker than in "ordinary" fiction (my word, not hers).

I listed what have been proposed by many as the "canonical" magical realism works:

- | Carey, Peter: "Illywhacker"
- | Carter, Angela: "Nights at the Circus"
- | Garcia Marquez, Gabriel: "One Hundred Years of Solitude"
- | Kundera, Milan: "Immortality"
- | Rushdie, Salman: "Midnight's Children" and "Shame"
- | Swift, Graham: "Waterland"

Zambreno is currently teaching a course in magical realism, and its reading list is:

- | Garcia Marquez, Gabriel: "One Hundred Years of Solitude"
- | Morrison, Toni: "Sula"
- | Rushdie, Salman (UK/India): "Midnight's Children"

- | Calvino, Italo: "If on a Winter's Tale a Traveler..."
- | Esquivel, Linda: "Like Water for Chocolate"
- | Allende, Isabel's "House of the Spirits"

I also suggested that a couple of authors familiar to the audience who might be considered magical realists: Lisa Goldstein and Neil Gaiman (at least his "American Gods"). Another familiar work would be Mark Helprin's "A Winter's Tale". Zambreno felt that Italo Calvino's "If on a Winter's Tale a Traveler..." was quintessential magical realism. (She has also edited an anthology of magical realism.)

Zambreno said that one big difference between magical realism and what is called fantasy is that in magical realism, no sequels are possible.

Zambreno noted in passing that she had great difficulties in teaching some of the works she chose for her courses, because her students apparently claimed that "classics" (meaning anything taught in school, I suppose) couldn't be funny and so resolutely refused to see any humor in them. (Was it here or somewhere else where someone talked about a common professorial trick to get the entire class to read Chaucer by saying, "We're going to read all the tales except for The Miller's Tale, because that one is too obscene"?)

Far more than you ever wanted to know about magical realism, including a much longer reading list, can be found at <http://www.geocities.com/evelynleeper/magreal.htm>.

Neglected Films

I didn't actually attend this, but it consisted of three films Mark Leeper had picked out as unfairly neglected: "Dark Intruder", "The Devil Rides Out" (a.k.a. "The Devil's Bride"), and "Dragonslayer". After all three were shown, Leeper led a discussion of the films which I caught the tail end of, and it seemed as though the consensus was that these were indeed good films that seem to have fallen from view. One person said that these were "indeed gems", and another was pleased that in his notes, Leeper had also mentioned "Quest for Love". See <http://www.geocities.com/markleeper/WINDYNOTE.htm> for Leeper's notes on the films. (Note uppercase.)

Other neglected films mentioned in the part of the discussion I heard were "Stuntman", "Terror of Frankenstein", "Kronos", "Cronos", "The 27th Day", and "The Snorkel". (I should note that the three selections were chosen from a longer list of Leeper's, not all of which are available on 35mm for rental.)

Saturday Dinner

Dinner was at a Mongolian barbecue. I suppose this is as good a place as any to mention that socializing was tricky in that *lots* of people had "badge names" which bore no relation to their real names, and so even people that I knew I didn't necessarily know that I knew. Apparently the registration form is phrased in such a way as to appear to encourage people to have names other than their real ones on the badges.

Art Auction Saturday, 8PM

We don't usually attend art auctions, and certainly not for conventions from which we have to fly home, but we were told that the Windycon auction was amusing in its own right, and it was,

although some of the humor got tiresome after an hour or so. One thing that helped keep things moving and lively is that they had more than one auctioneer, so there was some variety and change of pace.

What You Should Have Read
Sunday, 10 AM
Suzanne Alles Blom, Jon Stopa, Shawna McCarthy

What You Should Have Read Sunday, 10 AM Suzanne Alles Blom, Jon Stopa, Shawna McCarthy

This was supposed to be a "best of 2001" panel to make up for there not having been one the previous Windycon, but that was apparently not communicated to the participants, who did a sort of combination of "best of the current books" and "classics you should read."

McCarthy started by recommending "The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay" by Michael Chabon, which she said was not science fiction (though I think it might be fantasy). Chabon has just published "Summerland", which she also recommended (and Darrell Schweitzer has often mentioned Chabon's short Lovecraftian story, "Laughter of Dark Gods", which appeared in "The New Yorker").

McCarthy also recommended Wil McCarthy's "The Wellstone" (a combination of hard science fiction and fantasy), as well as just about anything by Robert Charles Wilson. In non-science fiction, she liked Dennis Lehane mysteries such as "Darkness, Take My Hand".

Stopa liked Sean Williams and Shane Dix's "Echoes of Earth". Among older worlds, he recommended Philip K. Dick's "Ubik" and Arthur C. Clarke's "Against the Fall of Night". (There is apparently a later edition of that which had a sequel written by Gregory Benford added onto the end ("Beyond the Fall of Night"). This is not to be confused with "The City and the Stars", an earlier version of the same story, albeit by Clarke alone.)

Blom recommended Wen Spencer's "Alien Taste", Lois McMaster Bujold's "The Curse of Chalion", and Neil Gaiman's "American Gods". She also suggested G. M. Ford's mysteries set in Seattle with derelicts as a sort of "Baker Street Irregulars," and the non-fiction "Song of the Dodo: Island Biogeography in an Age of Extinctions" by David Quammen.

This led to a discussion of non-fiction books since, as McCarthy noted, science fiction needs all these non-fiction fields to work. Stopa had just finished "The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace, and the Course of History" by Phillip Bobbitt, about international law from 1500 to the present. Stopa said it actually had a bit of a science fiction connection in that it talked about the rise of "the trading state" in the sense of multi-national corporations, which was to some extent foreseen in science fiction. He also thought the audience would like David Deutsch's "The Fabric of Reality: The science of Parallel Universes--And Its Implications", a more science-based work.

Blom recently read John Boswell's "The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance".

Other recommendations from Stopa included Julie Czerneda, although he added, "Sometimes the plots are difficult to find in her books." McCarthy suggested Carolyn Gilman's "Halfway Human" and Liz Williams's "The Ghost Sister" or "Poison Master". Blom added Laurel Winter's young-adult novel "Growing Wings" to the list, as well as Winter's poetry.

This led someone to ask for recommendations for eighteen- or nineteen-year-olds. The list included David Brin's "Startide Rising", Orson Scott Card, Neil Gaiman's "American Gods", Laurell K. Hamilton's "Anita Blake" vampire novels (for those over eighteen), Frank Herbert's "Dune", Daniel Keyes's "Flowers for Algernon", Stephen King, Pat Murphy's "There and Back Again", Dan

Simmons's "Hyperion", and Connie Willis's short fiction.

Now this list led someone in the audience to complain that the panel was listing only "dead white guys" (even though most of the people named were still alive and several were women). This person's credibility was completely shot, however, when someone mentioned S. P. Somtow (a.k.a. Somtow Sucharitkul) and he exclaimed, "Another dead white guy!" (Somtow is alive--and Thai.)

It was also suggested that some of the "year's best" anthologies might be a good way to start people off on science fiction, since they would get a wide variety of authors without having to wade through long novels or series for each one.

Making a Name as a Fan Writer
Sunday, 11AM
Leigh Kimmel, Evelyn Leeper, Dick Smith

Description: "So what are those Hugo Best Fan Writers awards anyway? Fan writers talk about how to become a known fan writer. What are good topics and how do you get your name to everyone?"

This was another ill-attended panel, with the three of us trying to explain to the one audience member what fanzines are, and why people would give them away.

Closing Ceremonies
Sunday, 3PM

These were brief, and then it was off to O'Hare to stand in long lines and have long delays before our flight finally took off. This was not Windycon's fault. :-)

Miscellaneous

I will, however, make my standard complaint: The Green Room had no clock. [Steven Silver read this and wrote me, "I had specifically asked them to make sure there was a clock in the green room. I will be buying one this afternoon and painting the words 'Windycon Green Room' on the face."]

Overall, however, I would recommend Windycon. At 1366 attending, it was slightly bigger than Boskone has been in Framingham, but I suspect comparable with what we will see in Boston. In part this reflects the Chicago area's demographics, with more fans living outside the city and hence having cars than is true in the Boston area. For truly out-of-area fans, though, the issue of dealing with O'Hare is a drawback (as Logan is for Boskone). I suspect in these days of lessened service and more annoyance at airports, fans will be focusing in on conventions within driving distance of them (not counting Worldcons, of course, which are a special case). What this will do to regional conventions remains to be seen.

Evelyn C. Leeper may be reached via [e-mail](#) or you may visit her [Homepage](#).

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