

WisCon confab to put feminist twist on sci-fi

WisCon, Friday through Sunday, Concourse Hotel, registration \$30 at the door, one-day memberships are \$10 Friday, \$15 Saturday or Sunday; 256-4603. Admission is free to the dealers room, where books, T-shirts, games, cards, videos, jewelry and artwork may be purchased.

By *Randel Shard*

Feminism is the point of emphasis at WisCon.

So is it where no person has gone before . . . in science fiction? Hardly.

The feminist aspect of science fiction may seem unusual — given the stereotype of Capt. Kirk and adolescent male geekdom — but that is only a stereotype. This convention has been going strong for 19 years, exploring sci-fi and feminism.

"To me, the two go together just perfectly," says Jeanne Gommoll, a graphic artist and president of SF3, the group sponsoring the convention. "Any political idea or movement needs people who think about what the future will be after the changes."

WisCon draws women writers, especially from around Madison and the Midwest, says James Frenkel, consulting editor of Tor Books, a Madison-based sci-fi and fantasy publisher. Joan D. Vinge, a Hugo award-winning writer based in Madison, will read from her work. Between 500 and 1,000 people are expected to attend — many of them feminist academics.

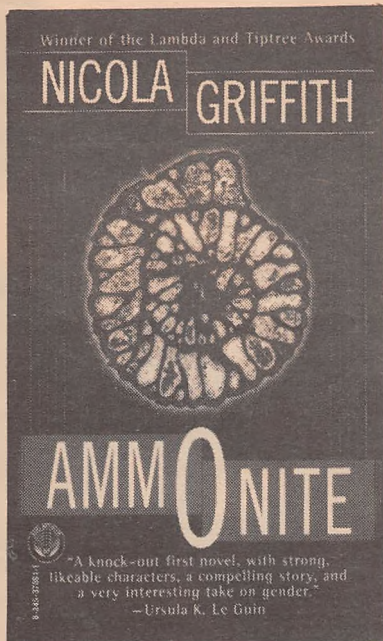
Guests of honor will include Sharyn McCrumb, author of the sci-fi murder mystery "Bimbos of the Death Sun."

Nicola Griffith is winner of the James Triptree Jr. Award, given for best gender-bending science fiction of the year. She is the author of "Ammonite," the examination of a society in which women can conceive and give birth — without men.

"The interesting thing about the book is the complexity of the story," says Karen Axness of A Room of One's Own feminist bookstore.

"It's not a utopia. Things are imperfect. There are deep

BOOKS



NICOLA GRIFFITH is this year's top gender-bending science fiction author.

problems in this society. It's not at all simplistic."

James Triptree Jr. was the pseudonym of Alice Sheldon, who used a pseudonym because she worked for the CIA, and took the name from the Triptree brand of preserves. Her work inspired other feminist writers.

"I think there's been an ongoing dialogue about feminism and science fiction — where it is and where it isn't — criticizing and praising works that ask questions and explore issues," says Axness.

"Science fiction is probably the most positive kind of feminist literature, in the sense that a lot of feminist literature talks about the way things are right now," says Frenkel.

"You're writing about possible futures. And one of the possible futures is a future in which there is a greater equality, or people are striving toward equality. It's a way of trying to solve problems."

The convention includes an art show, masquerade ball, book sale, speeches, a charity auction and panel discussions.