

WisCon 20

Opening Ceremonies Script

Cast

Narrators: Bill and Tracy

Jeanne	Denise, Pat Murphy
Ellen	Marsha, Big Shot
Meg	Elizabeth
Scott.....	John, Neo
Andy.....	Alan, Chip
Greg.....	Paul

Tracy Good evening. I'd like to welcome you to Wiscon 20. Thank you all for coming. This is a really special year for us; besides being our twentieth convention, we also have attendees here from around the globe. My esteemed colleague Bill has prepared a special welcome for everyone in their native tongues. Ready, Bill?

Bill *(Shuffling through papers)*

Tracy Ready, Bill?

Bill *Gestures; perhaps a nice shrug.* Okay...

Tracy For the Canadians

Bill Welcome to Wiscon 20, eh. It's about time you got here.

Tracy For the Argentinians

Bill Hi, Gabriella

Tracy Uh, for the...French

Bill *(pause)* Elcome-way oo-tay iscon-way.

Tracy *(looking down, covering eyes in embarrassment)* For the Japanese

Bill

Tracy *(doubletake w/ gaping mouth)*

Bill And for our guests from Australia and England, the pub's downstairs!

Tracy You know, Bill and I have worked on a couple Wiscon opening ceremonies, and we wanted to make this one an event to remember. We wanted to have some eyepopping special effects, but LucasFilm wouldn't return our calls. Then we considered a huge Busby Berkeley-style production number, but the ceiling in here isn't high enough for the giant neon rotating staircase.

So instead, we'd like to present a few scenes from Wiscon's past.

Bill And now, the obligatory disclaimer: the scenes you are about to witness have been recreated, and, in places, altered slightly for dramatic effect. If you were there—

Tracy —and you know who you are—

Bill —and you remember things differently.... your check is in the mail.

Tracy We'd like you to cast your mind back now, if you can, to 1976. Remember 1976?

Bill Back when cigarette ads were as common as leisure suits.

Tracy Back when you could buy an Olds Cutlass Supreme for \$6000.

Bill Back when a couple of obscure films were destined to get a few people's attention: Star Wars, and Close Encounters of the Third Kind. **Although**, the next year would produce a film to eclipse them both: the landmark epic of SF cinema... The Cat from Outer Space!

Tracy Luckily, I can't remember that. But some people might have heard about a conversation that happened after MidAmericon that year... it went something like this:

Denise Wow, our first World Con. That was great.

Marsha I couldn't believe how many people were there! I'm going to go to next year's, too, if I can afford it. What was your favorite part?

Denise No contest. Susan Wood's panel on feminist issues in SF. Even though I had to sit way in the back, it was fantastic.

Marsha I wish we'd had more time! They could have given that panel three hours, and it still wouldn't have been enough. And you know what I heard? They didn't want to let her do that panel.

Denise What? Why not?

Marsha "Not enough interest." Famous last words! Do you think other conventions have panels like that?

Denise If they don't, they certainly ought to. Think of the authors they could be discussing... Joanna Russ, Vonda McIntyre...

Marsha And Joan Vinge, and Le Guin... You know, I bet **we** could do it!

Denise Do what?

Marsha We could have our own convention! I bet we could have it on campus!

Denise Could we? I bet we could get at least a hundred people. But we don't know anything about running a convention.

Marsha Well, we've just been to one, so we know what to have. Let's see, conventions have about ten tracks of programming, a big dance...

Denise A costume contest, an art show...

Marsha A dealer's room selling stuff, a big hospitality room..

Denise And guests of honor! We could invite feminist SF authors! Wouldn't it be cool if we could get Ursula K. Le Guin to come?

Marsha Well... maybe not for our first convention... but maybe one day! Let's see who we can talk into helping us on this!

Denise But what should we call it?

Marsha Oh, we'll think of something later. It'll be something classy, and thought-provoking! And completely unique!

Denise How about... "WisCon?"

Marsha *(pause)* Nahh, I don't like it. We'll think of something better.

Bill And the rest... is history.

Tracy So the first Wiscon was held at the Wisconsin Center on the UW campus in February of 1977 with guests of honor Katherine MacLean and Amanda Bankier.

Bill 276 people paid \$4 in advance—or \$6 at the door—to get in. They enjoyed unusually balmy weather over the weekend, with temperatures in the 40's. And afterward, they came to a momentous decision:

Denise and Marsha Let's do it again next year!

Bill In its first five years, Wiscon members saw classic panels like the Madison Parade of Dead Cats come and go.

Tracy And the convention committee had memorable experiences like taking author Octavia Butler to the airport after a blizzard... and running out of gas on the way there.

Bill And so Wiscon marched on. The convention committee prepared for Wiscon number 6, to be held in March of 1982 and featuring Suzette Haden Elgin and Terry Carr as guests of honor.

Tracy The convention by this time had grown to over 400 attendees and moved to the Inn on the Park, where the committee planned to collect \$15 at the door for admission.

Bill Ahh... 1982. An Inn on the Park room cost only \$35 a night.

Tracy You could buy an Atari computer with a whopping 32K of memory for only \$800.

Bill You could wonder who shot J. R.

Tracy Ah, the days of our youth.

Bill and Tracy *(big sigh)*

Bill But the greatest thing about the early eighties was... the movies! You could spend just \$3.50 to see Beastmaster, Bladerunner, Wrath of Khan, Conan the Barbarian, The Empire Strikes Back, Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai, Brother from Another Planet, Android, Clash of the Titans, The Dark Crystal, Dragonslayer, E. T. the Extraterrestrial, Excalibur, Flash Gordon, Liquid Sky, The Road Warrior, Outland, Superman II, or Ator: the Fighting Eagle... just to name a few! *(He slumps over, panting)*

Tracy Do you need oxygen, or anything?

Bill *gestures to go on, he's okay*

Tracy By this time, preparing for Wiscon had fallen into second nature for the convention committee. To give you an idea of how a Wiscon comes together, we present a typical Wiscon meeting... and please remember: the names have been changed to protect the innocent.

ALL but Denise rhubarb, rhubarb, mumble, mutter, argue, etc.

Denise *(frazzled but staying calm)* Okay, already, we're at the 3-hour mark in this meeting. Could we PLEASE move on to the next topic? On the agenda, I see...

Paul *(interrupts)* Wait! Wait a minute. We still have a motion on the floor. We have to vote on it before we go on.

Others *(loud groan)*

Denise

(Sigh) Okay, I'm sorry. What IS the motion on the floor? I don't remember.

Paul

Well, Alan moved that future Guests of Honor should be elected by first submitting a paragraph of 100 words or less in support of your nomination, and then all persons who have attended at least 3 Wiscon meetings in the last year may vote by ranking the nominees from 1 to 10.

Marsha

Excuse me! Do you mean that the person you rank highest gets the 10, or the person you rank lowest gets the 10?

Alan

I meant that the highest gets the 10, and then we'll add up the points.

John

Oh, but we should be doing this by Australian ballot. Then it's the other way. The person you like most gets the 1.

Paul

That would be an amendment to the motion. First we have to vote on the motion.

Alan

No, no, that's okay, I'll accept that as a friendly amendment.

Denise

But then who's going to figure out this Australian ballot thing? I'm not gonna do it!

John

That's okay. I can write a computer program that will crunch the numbers for us.

Denise

Okay, okay, let's vote then.

Marsha

Wait! What are we voting on again?

Paul

The motion on the floor is that future Guests of Honor should be elected by first submitting a paragraph of 100 words or less in support of your nomination, and then all persons who have attended at least 3 Wiscon meetings in the last year may vote by ranking the nominees from 1 to 10. Then this was amended to say that the highest rank is 1 and the lowest 10, and the winner to be determined by Australian ballot.

Denise

Right! All those in favor, say "aye."

Alan, John

AYE!

Denise

Those opposed?

Marsha,
PAUL

NAY!

Denise

Elizabeth, why didn't you vote?

Elizabeth

(pause) Um.... what's an Australian ballot?

ALL but
Elizabeth

slap hand to head in exasperation

Bill

Let us draw the curtain on this tragic scene...

Tracy Despite the hair-tearing and personality clashes in the Wiscon con com, these people, hard as it may be to believe, all still liked each other. And even more than they liked each other, they liked putting on Wiscon.

Bill So Wiscon kept happening. It had its ups and downs. A definite “up” might be considered Jessica Amanda Salmonson’s hilarious guest of honor speech at Wiscon 8...

Tracy And under a category of “down,” perhaps we could consider this unfortunate incident at a Wiscon 11 information desk:

NEO Yes, can I help you?

Chip Well, I seem to have misplaced my pocket program. Could I have another one?

NEO Certainly. We’re selling them for fifty cents.

Chip Hmm. I don’t actually have my wallet with me. I’m on a panel soon, though, and I need to know where it is, so could I...

NEO *(priggishly)* I’m very sorry, but you know, it does cost us money to print these, and everybody’s always losing theirs, or leaving it in their hotel rooms, so this year, we made a policy, and we’re sticking to it.

Chip Oh, I see. Well, perhaps you’d just let me...

Big shot Excuse me, is there a problem here?

NEO This gentleman is looking for another pocket program, and...

Big shot Oh! Ah, here you go, Mr. Delaney. Um, I really enjoyed your panel on writing modern fantasy. I think your next panel is down the hall on your left, there.

Chip Thanks!

NEO Delaney??? Ohhh, no....

Bill The young fan did eventually recover from the terrible trauma, but it did take several years of intensive counseling.

Tracy We jump ahead in time now to 1989, the year of Wiscon lucky number 13. By this time we’d been forced to move out of the downtown area to the far southeast side Holiday Inn.

Bill That hotel, as you may recall, was notable mainly for its friendly staff and the swallows which flew in and out of the dealers’ room.

Tracy 1989 was an oddly appropriate year for Wiscon number 13. That same year saw the election of David Duke to public office in Louisiana, not to mention the Exxon Valdez disaster in Alaska.

Bill And the movies that year were terrible! Just terrible!

Tracy The convention committee was undergoing some changes, too, as more new blood filtered in. Meetings kept spinning like clockwork. Let's attend another typical Wiscon meeting.

Bill In this case, the names have been changed to protect the guilty!

Paul Okay, great! We wrapped that up. We're now only at the 2-hour mark in the meeting, and I think we should all offer a big "thank you" to Elizabeth for stepping in—at the last minute—to take over the Publications department without any prior experience. *(applauds)*

OTHERS *(all applaud)*

Paul Elizabeth, do you have anything you want to report just yet?

Elizabeth Um.. well... things are going okay, I guess. But I do have a couple of things I want to ask about the program book. The text is all entered in my Lisa computer at home, and I've started to lay it out. But I'm not sure if I'm supposed to do this 8 1/2 by 11 or whether it would be better to use 5 1/2 by 7. So I thought maybe it would be good to hear what all of you thought... so could we like, vote on it, or something?

Marsha Oh, well, I think 8 1/2 by 11 just looks so unprofessional. I mean, it makes it look like a fan publication or something.

Alan *(with ire)* Well, it IS a fan publication!

John But, you know, I think the advertisers like it better when it's 8 1/2 by 11. Because then their full page ads are bigger.

Elizabeth Ads? What ads? Where do the ads come from?

Paul Oh, ah, don't worry about that. It's pretty much too late to sell ads anyway.

Alan *(kindly)* Look, Liz, it's not that big a deal. Why don't you lay out a couple pages and see what looks better? Then you can let us know what you picked out.

Marsha But this is kind of important! The program book is the one thing that everyone takes home with them to remember our convention by! We have to present a dignified, professional image! I'd like to make a motion!

Alan Yeah, well, I got your motion right here, buddy!

Paul HOLD IT! Elizabeth, don't worry about all this. I'm sure that whatever you pick will be fine. Let me know if you need any help.

Elizabeth *(nervously)* Well, okay. But I did have one other thing....

Paul *(calmly)* Go ahead.

Elizabeth I'm wondering what I should do about the badges?

Paul *(slowly)* What about the badges?

Elizabeth What color should they be?

Marsha *(quickly)* Red.

Denise No, purple.

Marsha Definitely red. They're easy for the badgers to spot, and red is very difficult to copy, so we'll have to worry less about badge forging.

Denise But they OUGHT to be purple, because purple is a feminist color. It makes a statement!

Paul Okay, hold it, hold it! Look, why don't the two of you meet with Elizabeth outside the meeting and help her pick out the card stock. Okay?

Marsha, Denise Okay.

Paul Okay with you, Elizabeth?

Elizabeth Oh, yes, that would be fine.

Alan *(sarcastically)* Yes, I think that's a wonderful idea. They can help you collate all 700 program books then, too. That works out just great!

Marsha & Denise Umm.../ Ahhh....

Tracy At least it's easy to see that they never lost their passion for the convention!

Bill And the next six years didn't see it abate much, either. Of course, a large part of the credit for that goes to Pat Murphy and Karen Joy Fowler and their creation of the Tiptree award. It lit a bonfire of enthusiasm in the Madison fan group. Many of you may remember Wiscon 15 in 1991, when Pat Murphy's guest of honor speech dropped this bombshell:

"Pat Murphy" And so I would like to announce the creation of the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award, to be presented annually to a fictional work that explores and expands the roles of women and men. We're still in the planning stages, but we plan to appoint a panel of five judges and we plan to finance the award—and this is another stroke of genius on Karen's part—through bake sales. If you want to volunteer to run a bake sale, talk to me after the speech.

Elizabeth Wow! What wonderful news!

Marsha This award is going to get a lot of media attention. Some really great fiction is going to get put on the map!

Elizabeth And this idea about bakesales is good, too. We could have bakesales. I'll host one at WorldCon.

Marsha I'm going to Disclave this spring, I could have one there. We should print up some flyers!

Elizabeth And you know what would be ideal? A cookbook! And we could call it, "The Bakery Men Don't See!"

Bill So imagine their surprise when Pat Murphy revealed, a mere 12 months and several thousands of dollars later:

"Pat Murphy" You know that thing about the bake sales? Well, that was sort of a joke.

Elizabeth and Marsha *(long pause and stare at "Pat")*

Elizabeth *(irony)* But Pat... we're feminists!

Marsha *(even more irony)* We don't **have** a sense of humor!

Tracy While the Tiptree was born here in Madison, it did fly off on its own to be presented at some other conventions. But it was destined to come back to Wiscon, just as Wiscon was destined to return to downtown Madison.

Bill We take you now to a fairly typical party in Madison fandom. And this time, the facts have been changed... to make a better story.

Denise Hi! Come on in! Happy New Year!

John Happy New Year! Sorry we're so late.

Marsha The roads were just terrible. You wouldn't believe it.

Denise Don't worry, you're the first to arrive. Oh, is that homebrew? Put it in the cooler on the porch...

John Yes, and I brought all my leftover Christmas cookies, too. I'll put them on the table.

Marsha And I brought four cheesecakes! I hope people will be hungry!

Denise How nice... look, it's Elizabeth and Alan!

Elizabeth Hi, happy new year. I'm sorry we're late.

Alan The roads....

Denise Yeah, I know, they're terrible. I'm glad you made it. Oh good, more Christmas cookies.

Alan And I brought a cheesecake.

Denise Okay, ah, if you can find some room on the table... maybe the kitchen counter?

Paul Hi, sorry I'm late. Sure was fun driving over in all this snow!

Denise Hey, great to see you! Hope you didn't bring a cheesecake!

Paul *(very seriously)* I can't eat cheesecake.

Denise Oh, er, have a beer. Or there's soda in the red cooler. Oh, there's Judy and Helen coming up the driveway, I better go open the door.

Elizabeth So, John, I haven't seen you in a while! What have you been up to lately?

John Oh, well, you know, Christmas holiday stuff with the folks. The usual... I **have** started to lay out the pocket program a little bit.

Elizabeth Oh, really? Tell me about it. That will have an impact on scheduling, you know.

John Well, I want to use these special symbols to indicate which program items are feminist in nature, which have the guests of honor, which are media, which are science panels, which are fannish....

Elizabeth Doesn't that sound a little too detailed?

John No, it's going to be very easy for people to figure out. People are symbol-oriented!

Elizabeth Oh, well... we mustn't turn this party into a Wiscon meeting, now! I'm so tired of that joke about how Madison fan parties always turn into meetings!

Alan What are you two doing over here, having a meeting or something?

John No, no, nothing like that. So what's new with you?

Alan Well, I've been meeting with a guy at the Concourse. He seems to think we'd be welcome back there.

John What? I thought they liked the high school wrestlers better than us! They buy more drinks in the bar, anyway.

Alan Well, we wouldn't be in on the same weekend as the wrestlers. In fact, we'd miss all the March Madness tournaments.

Marsha What's this? The Concourse? Would we have to go in January or something?

Alan Actually, there's a very attractive date open in May. What do you think of Memorial Day weekend?

Elizabeth Think about it! A four day weekend, beautiful weather, the farmer's market, lots of restaurants... people would love it!

Marsha Yeah... no more driving through thick fog banks to get the guests of honor from the airport... and no blizzards, either.

John Gosh, we'd have room for all those great programming ideas with an extra day to spread it out over.

Alan We have to move quickly on this, though, because we could lose the date any time. Say... you know what? We have a quorum of the committee here! We could just decide now and get it over with! Then I could talk to the guy at the Concourse right away on Monday. We just need Paul. Hey, Paul, Paul, come here a minute!

Marsha Sssh... not so loud! Denise will kill us for having a meeting at her party! You know she hates that!

Paul What's up?

Alan With you here, we have a quorum of the committee. We need to decide something quickly. We can reserve Memorial Day weekend at the Concourse if we vote to do it now.

Paul Well, that sounds nice, but the rest of the committee should have been informed if you planned on having a meeting here.

Elizabeth This isn't a meeting. It's just a quick vote.

Paul Well, but I don't have any paper to take minutes on, or anything.

Alan That's okay, don't worry about it. Look, should we go to the Concourse in May or what?

John I vote yes. Marsha?

Marsha Yes for me too. Let's get out of Winter Wonderland.

Paul Now, hold it...

Elizabeth I vote yes, too. It'll be so nice to be back downtown again.

Alan And I vote yes. So, Paul....

Paul Now just wait a minute! If this is going to be a vote, it needs to be official. We don't even have a motion on the floor.

Alan Yes, we do, you heard me.

Marsha And I seconded it. You just missed that part. So we're all set.

Paul But what about discussion?

John Been there.

Elizabeth Done that.

Paul But then....

Alan Paul, are you in favor or not?

Paul Well, yes.

Alan Then it's unanimous! I'll talk to the Concourse this week!

Denise Hey, you guys better not be having a meeting at MY party!

Conspirators Oh.. ah.. er.. no.. not us. We're not having a meeting! We wouldn't do that!

Marsha *(stage whisper)* Whew, that was close. I move we adjourn!

John *(also a loud whisper)* I second.

Paul But... but...

Alan I hope you don't have a problem with this, Paul.

Paul Well, no, it's just that...

Elizabeth Yes?

Paul A motion to adjourn needs no second!

All but Paul *(look at Paul mutely. long pause)*

Paul Oh, come on, I **had** to say it. Let's have some champagne!
Elizabeth Great! Then I declare this party adjourned!

Bill And so a new chapter in the annals of Wiscon began.
Tracy A new chapter, hell! We're gonna need a new book!
Bill But we don't want to stand up here any more! We want to go to panels!
Tracy We want to go to the consuite!
Bill We want to go where no one has gone before!
Tracy But mostly we want to get this convention going.
Bill So let's end by introducing our intrepid cast!
Tracy That's Bill!
Bill That's Tracy!
Tracy Scott Custis... Andy Hooper... Greg Rihn!
Bill Meg Hamel... Ellen Franklin... and our Wiscon 20 Coordinator, Jeanne Gomoll!

Now Jeanne does her stuff with speech, intro the GOH's, hand out the coordinator pins, make announcements, allow Don H. time for "Always Coming Home" plug.