

THE WEEK | Friday 5.28 – Thursday

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■ **BIRTHDAYS** Creedence Clearwater Revivalist John Fogerty, 1945.

■ CRITICS' CHOICES

WisCon 28

Concourse Hotel, through May 31

Madison's nationally renowned science fiction convention emphasizes issues of feminism, race and class. This year's guests of honor are novelists Eleanor Arnason and Patricia A. McKillip, who will speak at 8:30 pm on Sunday. The weekend also includes readings, parties, auctions and exhibits. A reception for the WisCon authors occurs at A Room of One's Own on Thursday, May 27, at 6:30 pm.

Brat Fest

Hilldale Mall,

10 am-6 pm, through May 31

The annual event, which raises money for local charities, is billed as "The World's Largest Brat Fest." And after eating 148,000 brats, last year's attendees might just be billed as "The World's Largest People." Get a brat and a soda for an incredibly low price and do your part to push this year's total past 150,000. (Those who prefer to go meatless can check out the Veggie Brat Fest on May 28-31 at University Avenue's Magic Mill.)

Madison Classic Horse Show

Alliant Energy Center Arena, 1 & 7:30 pm. Also Thursday (1 & 7:30 pm), Saturday (11:30 am & 7:30 pm) & Sunday (11:30 am), May 27, 29 & 30

The Midwest's best American Saddlebreds compete for cash prizes and bragging rights. Expect horses with elegant gaits and riders with really cute hats.

Festa Italia

McKee Farms Park, 5-11 pm.

Also Saturday (11 am-midnight) & Sunday (10 am-8 pm), May 29 & 30

The fest features a carnival, a bocce tournament and a slate of performers. Fill up on pasta and engage in discussions about Silvio Berlusconi's strange behavior.

Cycle Circus

1818 B-8 S. Park St., 6 pm

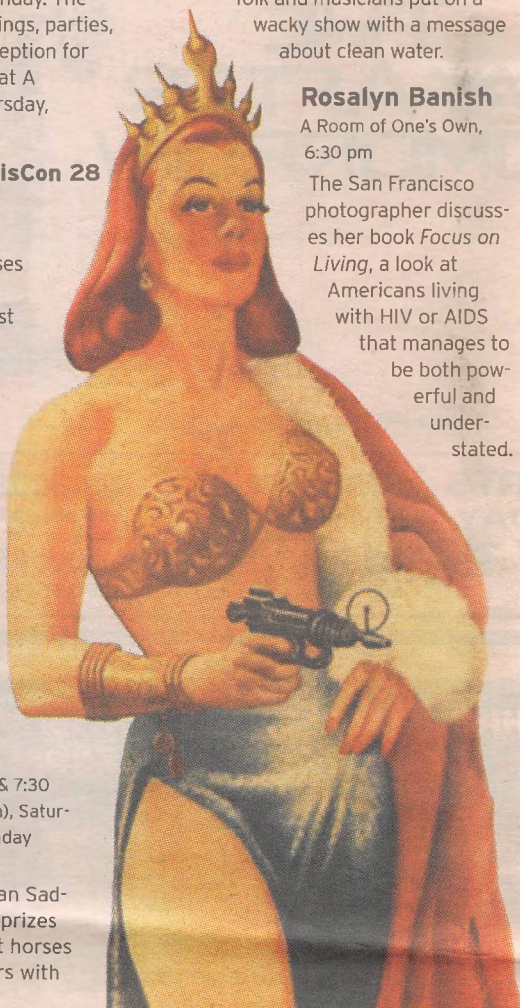
This traveling bunch of clowns, circus folk and musicians put on a wacky show with a message about clean water.

Rosalyn Banish

A Room of One's Own, 6:30 pm

The San Francisco photographer discusses her book *Focus on Living*, a look at Americans living with HIV or AIDS that manages to be both powerful and understated.

WisCon 28



28 years later, sci-fi lovers flock here

By Sophia Estante

The Capital Times

In the late 1970s, an informal group of 10 UW-Madison students majoring in everything from mathematics to comparative literature started a local science fiction convention.

Twenty-eight years later, WisCon, an annual science fiction convention with a feminist twist, has international appeal, drawing more than 700 science fiction fans, social activists and authors from around the world to downtown Madison for five days (Thursday through Monday) of author readings, heated book discussions, panels and all-night parties.

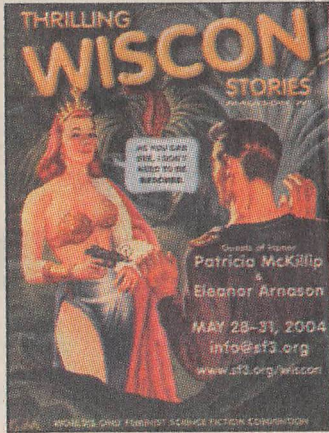
"This is a crowd that when they get really wild they want to talk," event coordinator Victor Raymond says.

Attendees are flying in from Australia, Germany, Japan and Sweden for the convention's opening reception Thursday at 6:30 p.m. at A Room of One's Own bookstore, 307 W. Johnson St.

All other events related to the convention, including the 206 scheduled programs, will be held at the Concourse Hotel.

One-day memberships are available for \$10 for children and \$25 for adults by walking up to the registration table in the Concourse Hotel on Saturday.

Regular WisCon memberships are also available at the convention for \$50 for adults and \$25 for children ages 7-12. Child care is available by calling 233-8850 before the event.



Even though the word "feminist" might scare away some potential male attendees, organizer Diane Martin says that nearly as many men attend the conference as women.

"The biggest misconception about WisCon is that there are no men who attend the convention," Raymond says. "What brings us together is that we like really good books."

The convention combines quirky sci-fi appeal with serious scholarship.

"We actually have a reputation of being a really serious convention for literary criticism," organizer Richard Russell says. "Madison is seen as the worldwide center for feminist science fiction analysis. A lot of people don't know that."

Organizers of WisCon refer to science fiction as "the literature of possibility," noting its political importance for socially marginalized groups such as women and people of color.

"Science fiction is about the future. It shows how the

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Eleanor Arnason, author of five books, including "The Sword Smith," will be a guest of honor at this weekend's WisCon festival of science fiction.

WisCon

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world doesn't have to be the way you see it today," Russell says. "You won't see people dressed up in pointy ears at a WisCon convention. We aren't into changing the world with new gadgets and technologies. We're interested in how the world can be changed through new social structures."

Raymond, a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, says the convention is unlike other science fiction conventions because it is grounded in everyday life.

"It addresses the social issues that we face in our personal lives," he says.

Some panels are titled "The Bra Panel," "The Gaylaxians Panel" and "Social Issues in Food." A complete list of WisCon events is available at www.sf3.org/wiscon/.

Although Raymond says that few authors would label themselves as "feminist science fiction writers," a handful of fantasy writers including Suzy McKee Charnas, Ursula Le Guin, Octavia Butler and Madison resident Joan Vinge address important social issues by imagining new roles for women and minorities in their books.

Jeanne Gomoll, a local graphic designer with Union

Street Design and one of the original founders of WisCon, says that the convention helps encourage authors writing in this vein since it is home to the prestigious James Tiptree Jr. Award.

The book award is named in honor of Alice Sheldon, who adopted a male pen name to combat gender bias against her writing.

"We raise money for the award by holding bake sales—a very traditional way for women to raise money," Gomoll says. "Our slogan is 'World Domination Through Bake Sales!'"

WisCon also spun off a book award called the Carl Brandon Award, which recognizes outstanding science fiction books featuring people of color.

Eleanor Arnason, author of five books including "The Sword Smith," and Patricia McKillip, author of "In the Forests of Serre," are this year's guests of honor.

While several of the core group of founders still organize the WisCon conventions, Russell says that their newest challenge is attracting the involvement of a younger generation. WisCon 28 has a teen room and programming for children.

He says, "In reality, the future belongs to the next generation."