

Aussiecon Three
A convention report by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Beginning

Aussiecon Three, the 57th World Science Fiction Convention, was held in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, 2-6 September 1999. Approximately 1870 people attended.

The Convention Centre was certainly sufficient for the convention--overcrowding was not a problem. It was a bit diffuse, however, with a very long walk from the Green Room to the panel rooms, and the bid tables, site selection, and cafe somewhat hidden around a corner. I think they planned to have the rooms open at the other end, onto that area, and then discovered that they could not.

The Centre was directly connected to our hotel, which turned out to be useful, because there were escalators in the Convention Centre from ground level to the lobby level, while in the hotel, one had to climb a full flight of stairs to get in. The hotel apparently assumes that everyone will enter by car, from the car ramp which does spiral around the hotel up to that level, or will use the single elevator for disabled access (which was actually in the Convention Centre as well).

The restaurant situation was strange. Other than the hotel restaurants, the only restaurants close to the hotel and open for dinner were in the Southgate and Crown Casino complexes. This made the selection much more limited than usual, since a lot of the restaurants in these complexes were filled with Melbourne business people (who all seem to dress in (black suits), which made them look too

upscale for a quick drop-in by a group of fans. There were two reasonably priced buffets and a food court of variable quality, so there were cheap places. The list of places to get party supplies (or even room snacks) had nothing within walking distance--everything involved taking a tram.

There were some problems. The ribbons were delayed by Federal Express and did not arrive until late Wednesday night (registration opened Tuesday evening). There was no voodoo board until Friday afternoon because the Convention Centre did not have enough large bulletin boards (why wasn't this all arranged beforehand?). The Pocket Programme had quite a few typos, strange alphabetization (every panel title starting with "The" was alphabetized under "T"), no cross-reference back to the schedule from the panel descriptions, and no indication of who was the moderator for a given panel. The last was because the programming staff decided that they would not choose the moderators; the panelists should decide. The problem was that this could happen only in the Green Room ten minutes before the panel, and that does not give the moderator much chance to come up with questions, or to provide materials or hand-outs. (Luckily, I actually had an inkling I would be moderating the alternate history panel, though it was not clear until the panel convened whether it would be "AH 101" or "Australian AHs.")

To some extent all this did not matter, because by Saturday people were being told to use the daily schedule sheets and ignore the Pocket Programme except as a souvenir. The daily schedules and the newsletters were all available (remarkably) on time. (They never published a final warm body count in them, though.)

I will not give my usual count of total program items, because I would have to do it by hand. I went to twenty-one panels (including talks and speeches), five special events, two performances, and a video. (Four of the panels and talks were two hours long, and one a half-hour. I liked the idea that a topic that was too much for one hour was given two and a topic that was enough for a half hour was not stretched to an hour.)

The Other Awards Ceremony was moved temporally four times and spatially three between when I got the Pocket Programme and when the ceremony finally occurred.

The Souvenir Book listed all known Worldcons, including next year's (Chicon 2000), but inexplicably omitted the one for 2001 (Millenium Philcon).

The art show was very small: 24 panels and 4 tables. Some of the more interesting works were on the tables. The sculpture "A 'Usual' Night on the Town" by Phil Lynch used various Australian woods listed and added, "Other more exotic woods were used however 'I'm damned if I know what they were except that they had character.'" There was also digital artwork by Grant Freckelton and painted stones by Marilyn Pride.

There were also two Ian Gunn Memorial panels and a big Star Wars display including a large (1.5-meter diameter) plastic fighter model, but these were around the back of the art show panels and not well displayed.

The Dealers Room was small but "cherce"--over three-quarters books.

The Scientist at the Heart of SF
Thursday, 11AM
John Foyster

"A paper discussing Gregory Benford and hard science fiction."

Foyster began by saying that he wanted to do this paper because "most people have forgotten about this; and because our Guest of Honour is one such person."

He went on to say that Clute and Nicholls's *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* has an entry for "Science Fiction," but it is only for the magazine of that name. You need to look at "Definitions of SF" or "SF" for real information. There is also no entry for "science" (or for "fiction"). There are entries for "biology" and some other specific fields, but none for "chemistry" or "biochemistry." (Foyster added parenthetically, "Sorry about that, Ike." Asimov hated the nickname, but probably would have appreciated the aside.)

There is an entry for "scientist." Foyster summed it up, and added, "There are a lot of mad scientists in there, but not all are mad or even eccentric."

Foyster said that Wells's *Cavor* is eccentric and obsessive, but that the novel (*First Men in the Moon*) at least is slightly scientific and focuses on the scientist as scientist, while *The War of the Worlds* is an adventure novel. "*The Time Machine* is about how a scientist would behave and only peripherally about time travel." And the reaction to *The Time Machine* was extremely supportive, particularly by authors such as Henry James.

Working up to *Timescape*, Foyster referred to Richard Wagner's *Parsifal*, where a character sings, "You see, my son, time becomes space." (He said to see the 1982 film of *Parsifal* to see this visualized.)

This was all working up to *Timescape* by noting that "some SF is about scientists and the way they behave and some of it is in adventure settings." The lumping of these two together is "erroneous and not helpful," according to Foyster. When science fiction readers identify what they think is the best, they tend to choose the latter, those in the minority about scientists. Examples he gave were Isaac Asimov's "Nightfall" and the "Foundation" series, which he said is "the story of Hari Seldon struggling with the problem of history."

Foyster continued, "One man is largely responsible for distorting the role of scientists in science and SF--Hugo Gernsback." Gernsback, he said, had the sugar-coated pill theory of science fiction: one could attract young minds to science through science fiction. And this is how he promoted science fiction. Though Gernsback claimed his stories were based on science, the example Foyster read (Chapter 8 from *Ralph 124C 41+*, "The Menace of the Invisible Cloak") belied this.

Foyster then went on to say that in the sense that Benford's *Timescape* is about time travel, it is in a special way. For one thing, Benford had actually researched time travel through tachyons as part of his work. Also, *Timescape* is an early novel, and in writing an early novel, "a writer is most likely to think freshly about all those problems that might arise in the writing of the novel."

Also, Benford included real people, people who changed over time, including three alter egos of himself. The Benford in 1998 is trying to warn the Benford of the 1960s of the coming ecological crisis. (Naturally, in this 1973 novel, the 1960s period is more accurate than the 1998 one.) There is therefore "a close and pressing reason for this scientific endeavor." He added, "The whole of the book is about scientists trying to do science": not just trying to learn, but also trying to obtain permission and funding for their activities.

"*Timescape* is a realist novel, Foyster claimed, because we see our world, we see flaws in the characters, and we are surprised by some of their failings. "Benford recognizes the fact that if you are successful in constructing a time machine, so will others be later in your own timeline," though the 1998 alter ego of him takes longer in the book to come to this realization. (Foyster parenthetically asked why UFO enthusiasts do not think UFOs might be time machines.)

Timescape is considered hard science fiction, Foyster said. In fact, *Timescape* might be considered *real* hard science fiction (requiring knowing science, not just reading about it). But *Timescape* is not science fiction as the term is generally used, according to Foyster; *Timescape* is category-shattering. Benford's "Galactic Center" cycle is not, however. This series is about the "final stages of the

evolution of mankind, but it is harder to agree that the theme was successful or the series worthwhile." It has a man from our time as the central character, but Foyster feels he "is less than satisfactory in this role because there is nothing that ties him to me." The science is "Van Vogtian and Campbellian." It has less or no scientific endeavor at all, and reverts to the 1930s Campbellian device of expository lumps. Foyster claimed that this showed the "insidiousness of the Gernsback meme" because we know Benford is "someone we know can write a superb novel." He gave a sample "expository lump" from the end of *Sailing Bright Eternity* (and the series) about the thermodynamics of information (which however sounded more Stapledonian to me).

I thought this unusual, not only in that Foyster was criticizing the Guest of Honour, but that he was doing this while the Guest of Honour was sitting right next to him! And in fact, Foyster turned to Benford at this point and asked, "Are you sure this is not recycled from Gernsback?" "No, this is Godspeak," replied Benford, to which Foyster said, "Many find it difficult to make that distinction."

Foyster now asked Benford if he would like to respond, and Benford said he would. Benford started by saying that it is certainly true that *Timescape* was an unusual kind of science fiction novel. But he has written several atypical science fiction novels, and they all have one-word titles: *Artifact*, *Cosm*, and the upcoming *Eater*, as well as *Timescape*.

He noted that *Timescape* was never reviewed by the *New York Times*--a review had been written but had apparently not been used because it was too favorable. "The conventional literary world does not want to read books about scientists," he said (though I wonder where Michael Crichton fits into all this). So he decided to write books that might get outside the genre.

Benford said, "SF will be like jazz in that when it's gone, people will give it more tribute." The problem with our culture, he added, is that it is getting sliced up and there is very little communication between the parts of it: "Life is big and varied." And while Henry James liked *The Time Machine*, he turned against Wells later, and in the literary world, James won.

Regarding the "expository lump," Benford said that it was the voice of a higher intelligence [i.e., it *really* was God], and he was trying to demonstrate memes as our only sign of a higher intelligence. This was "having God walk on stage and say, 'This is what it's all been about. Okay, a little clunky, but it worked for Wagner, so ...'"

In response to a question about the problem of divisions within the culture, Benford said that the current situation is unfixable, the conventional short story will certainly die within a couple of decades (surviving only in the genre), and outlasting them is probably the best strategy.

Utopia, Genocide, and the Alien Contact Novel
Thursday, 12N
Joan Gordon

"The speaker is a past president of the Science Fiction Research Association and a prominent scholar in the field."

Gordon teaches both science fiction literature and the Holocaust, and said she started seeing connections between the two, particularly in the area of this talk/paper.

Her premise is that genocide is a Utopian project. She cited Michael Ignatieff's definition: "Genocide is any systematic attempt to exterminate a people or its way of life."

Gordon claimed that living with everyone like you is alluring (I am not sure I agree with that). Annihilation (of the other) may occur through familiarization or through erasure, but both are impulses toward genocide. As Gordon pointed out, Hitler's project was Utopian.

Gordon said that we understand "post-holocaust" to be something else in science fiction, not dealing with genocide. And "Post-Holocaust" addresses genocide and utopias in a way that "post-holocaust" does not (with exceptions such as Sherri Tepper or Suzy McKee Charnas). Alternate histories (in which Hitler wins, for example) can be included in Post-Holocaust, but often consider genocide and racism only peripherally. "Why does 'post-holocaust' not invoke 'post-Holocaust'?" she asked. I would say it is because the two words have different sources, and people writing post-holocaust works start with the ideas and concepts and not the label. But Gordon thinks that people believe that "to build a utopia on the corpses of a genocide after Hitler would be hideous." She also said that a "sense of hallowed solemnity which surrounds the Holocaust" may make references to it problematical.

She gave the specific ways in which these three "genres" differ. "Post-holocaust" literature generally focuses on isolation, survival, and rebirth. Alternate histories generally focus on Fascism and rebellion. And alien contact stories often focus on racism and genocide. So alien contact is more suited to examine the issue of the Holocaust than post-holocaust novels. She did note that post-holocaust stories often use disease or natural disaster, but sometimes characters will say, "Oh, we eliminated [x]." It is impossible to write a Utopian novel that avoids this, which is why (according to Gordon), there have been no German utopian novels since World War II.

At this point, much of the talk got incomprehensible. For example, "*The Sparrow* [by Mary Doria Russell] provides a zone of occult instability where a third, more utopian possibility occurs."

While Gordon noted that the characters in "The Sparrow" and its sequel "Children of God" should have expected that the capitalistic, technologic, artistic culture might be similar to us in other ways, she also said, "Companionable human complacency in these novels leads to genocide." Also, everything in the humans' set of rules, even the Prime Directive, is within the realm of human thought. Gordon claims this is impossible to avoid, but it seems to me that Russell had to be able to avoid it to write the novels.

Another sound bite: The characters experience an "epiphany of cognitive estrangement smack dab in the zone of occult instability."

Gordon asked, "If genocide is a utopian project, is Utopia inevitably a genocidal project?"

SF & Sexuality
Thursday, 2PM
Stephen Dedman, Joe Haldeman, Robert Silverberg

"Everything you always wanted to know about your favorite Martian!"

[Warning: this has words that may offend you. If there are words that offend you, do not read this.]

Haldeman started by saying, "Bob knows everything there is to know about SF and sexuality."

Silverberg said that he was *not* going to tell the wombat joke. It seems that at Aussiecon One he dreamt he was on a panel telling a completely filthy joke about a female wombat and a member of the con. When he told people about this dream, they all wanted to know the joke, but there *was* no joke-- it was just a dream. However, his friend Sidney Coleman constructed a wombat joke in response to this, and that was the joke he would not tell.

Haldeman began the panel topic by saying that Greg Egan's recent "Oceanic" presented an aspect of sexuality in science fiction that is fairly common. The story has a big sexual subplot where people exchange genitals. (Haldeman said this did not do much for him, but "to each his own," to which Silverberg responded, "To each, each other's own.") But was this necessary to the story? Haldeman said that removing it would have changed the story, but not that much. However, Haldeman said, he would defend its inclusion as the sort of "neat stuff" that science fiction has.

Dedman gave the example of Egan's *Distress*, which has Asexers who have their sexual parts and the parts of their brains associated with sex removed. The sanest character in the novel is asex. But the sex theme is again secondary. On the other hand, Egan's "Cocoon," involving the ability to genetically engineer out the gene for homosexuality, has sexuality as its primary theme. Dedman said that he admired Silverberg's stories in *Unfamiliar Territories* because Silverberg can incorporate sex well in short fiction. "How do you do it?" he asked.

Silverberg answered, "What an interesting question. And I'll put it where I put the wombat joke." But he said that he would distinguish between sex as an aspect of human behavior and sex as the speculative component of a science fiction story. Of the second type, he cited many of the stories of Theodore Sturgeon, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, and William Tenn's "Venus and the Seven Sexes." Silverberg said he uses it as characterization or "to keep the reader's interest as you are getting on to the next dreary bit of explanation."

Silverberg observed that he started writing in the "pre-sexual era," which did not end until Philip José Farmer's *The Lovers* was published, which has as a major plot component what happened at the moment of orgasm between a human and a giant bug. "I had encountered the concept of orgasm by then (I was 17) but never in a science fiction story." As far as adding sex to his own stories, he said that he dealt with it as thoroughly as he could and "conducted a great deal of research."

He was including sex in his stories, and there was no real censorship. The only instance of censorship he encountered was for a story he wrote for *Playboy*. It was about an alcoholic, and they wanted him to change that to a drug addict.

Dedman said that when Brian Aldiss was writing *The Hand-Reared Boy* and a science fiction novel simultaneously, the publisher of the former wanted him to take some sex out, and the publisher of the latter wanted him to add more.

Silverberg said that there is a problem when any aspect of character begins to overwhelm the speculative aspect, and that sometimes the sex *needs* to be speculative in nature to avoid this.

Haldeman talked about the homosexuality in *The Forever War*. The only problem he ever had was with the stage version, and that was that the gay press was hostile because they did not get it--they did not understand *why* Haldeman made all the characters except his protagonist gay. (It was to increase the protagonist's sense of isolation.) But, he added, there is no such thing as bad publicity. He admitted, though, "The view of homosexuality in *The Forever War* is pretty primitive." If he wrote it today, he said, it would be a more sympathetic view. (I thought this was a quite gracious and mature thing for a writer to volunteer--most would probably not call attention to things they considered flaws in their early works.)

He did write a recent sequel, "A Separate War" (in *Far Horizons* edited by Robert Silverberg), which follows the female character of *The Forever War*. In the homosexual future, she finds a girlfriend, but Haldeman admitted he would not have thought to write anything like that for the male character. He noted that for straight men, homosexuality is something other people do, and it is more uncomfortable if it is a character like them. Dedman added that he has also written gay characters but no gay male sex scenes.

Silverberg said that someone came to him recently and told him that there was a major discussion on Usenet about "Was Bob Silverberg gay?" He tracked this back and discovered that it started when someone noted that the novels of Peter Hamilton have gay characters, and was Peter Hamilton gay? Someone responded that *The Book of Skulls* had gay characters--you might as well ask if Robert Silverberg was gay. So someone asked, "Well, *is* Robert Silverberg gay?" and they were off and running. Silverberg said that he found this amusing because he had been "married, in the aggregate, quite a long time." But someone mentioned he was married and got the response that often gay people marry as camouflage. It was not until Mike Resnick said that the first marriage might be that, but

when Silverberg married a second time, that was a "master stroke of camouflage," that the thread died down. Silverberg said he was not gay, nor a woman, nor an alien. "This is called writing speculative fiction."

Dedman mentioned his story "Transit" about a romance between a Muslim and a hermaphrodite in a future when most people were hermaphrodites, and said his hermaphrodite friends thought the story well done. Silverberg was clearly taken aback by this statement and asked if there was some terminology confusion here. Did Dedman mean bisexual or did he actually mean people who had two sets of plumbing? Dedman said yes, he meant the latter--he had many bisexual friends, but not as many hermaphrodite ones.

Dedman asked if people thought there would be a backlash to the sexual revolution. Why does science fiction seem to assume that the current trend will continue? Haldeman said that not everything did, and gave Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* as a counterexample. But he asked, "How do you put stuff back in Pandora's Box?" (And Silverberg immediately cautioned, "Careful, Joe, careful.")

But Silverberg agreed, saying, "I think it's irreversible." He also pointed out, "Sex did exist in the 1950s. [But it] was a different sexual atmosphere in the 1950s. The degree of hypocrisy necessary to achieve the desired effect was greater." He said that AIDS had something to do with this, but it was also a matter of style--wild promiscuity is no longer the fashion. At least he thinks it is not. "I took myself out of the system. I'm not a current observer of it all."

Dedman said that Australia was trying to censor the Internet, and Silverberg pointed out, "Places like Iraq are discovering the difficulty of censoring the Internet. Australia is not going to manage it."

Silverberg said that when *The World Inside* was published by the Science Fiction Book Club, they put a warning on the flyer about sexual content, and the book has been selling very nicely ever since then.

Someone asked if Robert Heinlein had gratuitous sex in his later writing. Dedman said, "He was catching up." and Silverberg added, "Well put--seriously." Silverberg explained that by the end of Heinlein's career, restrictions had loosened up and Heinlein could write as he pleased, but he did not know how because "he was a gentleman of an earlier era."

Silverberg talked about a story in which a character is crying out, "To fuck! To fuck!" which appeared in the magazine as "To f---! To f---!" As Silverberg said, "'To f---' will always go down in my mind as a bizarre, perverted epitome of a last gasp."

Haldeman said in one of his stories *Analog* changed "fuck" to "hump" and "shit" to "crap." They are not the same, he said.

Dedman said that Ellen Datlow said the strangest censorship she encountered on *Omni* was their objecting to a scene in which porno magazines were tucked under a bed. The publishers of *Omni* (who also published *Penthouse*) said, "They should be on a shelf." They compromised by putting them in a drawer.

Haldeman said that *Playboy* thought his story "Brains" was too gross.

Someone in the audience suggested a letter code for stories, as they have for movies: N for nudity, L for language, V for violence, etc. Other people agreed in principle, but suggested I for ideas, C for characterization, P for plot, and so on. Someone in the audience said that every time they hear, "This movie contains adult themes," they think, "Oh, super-annuation and taxes."

Haldeman said that his novel about Vietnam, *War Year*, used the word "motherfucker" and was almost pulled from the public library in Sitka, Alaska.

Silverberg bemoaned all this. "I regret in a way that the lightning and thunder that those words could create has been lost." We have sacrificed some of the magic and power of these incantations. On the other hand, racial words have somewhat taken their place. "N---- has the kind of shock value that fuck used to have--and that's valuable."

According to an audience member, "cu--" is amazingly offensive in the United Kingdom, but is used commonly in the United States. (Or was it the other way around?--this does not sound right.) Someone else said it is now the strongest word in Australia. A third person said that "wanker" is much more offensive than Americans think.

Silverberg said the current term floating around seemed to be "shag." "Virgin Shaglantic Airlines" was sort of the capper for most.

Silverberg said that words carry different senses ("sanction" and "cleave" can mean exact opposites). "Prick" and "cu--" have both literal and figurative meanings. Silverberg said that Shakespeare used to use this all the time: "The bawdy hand of the dial is now upon the prick of noon" (*Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, Scene 4).

Dedman said that there are still some forms of sexuality that are avoided, e.g., incest (with the notable exception of Sturgeon's "If All Men Were Brothers, Would You Let Your Sister Marry One?") Silverberg observed, "Sturgeon dealt with the far reaches of sex." Haldeman said one recent trend that is becoming more common is the use of characters who have renounced sex or gender altogether (e.g., Greg Egan's Asexers).

Loose Canons
Thursday, 3PM
Peter Nicholls

"Who decides which authors are top? Critics? Fans? Academics? Media?"

Nicholls said that it is a fact of life that in encyclopedias, there are longer entries for people who have written more. But in addition, there are canons. How do they come into being and are they correct? How do we judge correctness? One method is the opinions of encyclopedias (though it is not clear to me how they get their cachet over other people's opinions, particularly when compiled by one or two people). There are awards. And there are sales--but more on that later.

Critical opinion comes from academics and fan writers, who are respectively critics who teach at universities and critics who do not. (Gary K. Wolfe once referred to "certain traditions of fan scholarship," which Nicholls found an interesting phrase.) Nicholls then read a long portion from the paper he gave at Intersection (which I had thought I reported on then, so did not take notes on here, only to discover I was wrong). He concluded with a critique/criticism of Damien Broderick which ended, "When he stands before the semantic crimes commission, Broderick will be unable to plead 'I was only following orders.'"

Nicholls said, "There is an academic canon but it has nothing to do with the real world." In the academic arena, the facts cited are wrong and the essays are uninteresting. The academy cannot understand what is influential and what is not. The academy likes J. G. Ballard, Arthur C. Clarke, Samuel R. Delany, Philip K. Dick, William Gibson, Ursula K. LeGuin, Stanislaw Lem, Doris Lessing, C. S. Lewis, Joanna Russ (and other feminist writers), Olaf Stapledon, Kurt Vonnegut, and H. G. Wells. (Nicholls once met a friend of his mother who had known H. G. Wells and asked pleaded with her to tell him something interesting about Wells. "He cheated dreadfully at ping-pong" was the revelation he got.)

Authors the academy does not approve of include Brian Aldiss, Ian Banks, Greg Bear, Gregory Benford, Alfred Bester, John Crowley, Robert A. Heinlein, Larry Niven, Dan Simmons, Connie

Willis, and Gene Wolfe. In particular, Nicholls said, there is hardly anything written on Willis, who has won more combined Hugos and Nebulas for fiction than anyone else.

There is also a fan canon, he said, and everyone has a personal canon. But to be in a fan canon, books need to be shelved in libraries, and sold in bookshops, and talked about by friends and media, which returns somewhat to sales. Nicholls criticized Russell Blackford and Sean McMullen's *Strange Constellations*, a history of science fiction in Australia, because they said in it, "Young adult writers are out of our scope." (This refers to writers of fiction for young adults/teens, not writers who are themselves young adults. I assume.) Nicholls thought this made no sense, particularly since some young adult authors outsell "adult" authors 20-to-1.

He also said he has been told that you cannot judge books this way (from sales). "Why not?" he asked. Isn't it possible that Stephen King sells better than John Saul because he is the better writer? But Nicholls also admitted that sales can be and are manipulated by publishers, and that the allocation of publicity budgets has a big effect on sales.

(Publishers can get it wrong. Nicholls said that J. R. R. Tolkien was told by the publisher that he had to pay for the first printing of *Lord of the Rings* because the publisher thought it too non-commercial, but Tolkien could have a much larger royalty on it to compensate. Tolkien cleaned up.)

So you cannot always trust sales, and spin-off and series books in particular sell themselves. (These, by the way, are usually "work for hire," with a flat fee and no royalties for the author.)

Nicholls said that the most successful writer at con is Terry Pratchett, whose works make the best-seller lists in Britain. Looking at the best-seller lists in the United States (and I think the *New York Times* one in particular), only a few authors have hit number one. Peripheral authors would include Umberto Eco and Jean M. Auel. In horror we have R. L. Stine, Stephen King, Dean Kootz, and Anne Rice. In fantasy there is David Eddings, Terry Brooks, and Salman Rushdie. In science fiction, there is only Arthur C. Clarke and Michael Crichton. There are others who have made the list but not the top spot: William Gibson, Douglas Adams, Anne McCaffery, Frank Herbert, Samuel R. Delany, and Robert A. Heinlein. One reason that Heinlein never made number one was that (according to David Hartwell), until the 1970s, science fiction and other genres (other than perhaps mysteries) were not counted.

In awards, the Hugos and the Nebulas are most important. The Hugo probably carries more weight, and Nicholls said he trusts the Hugo more. But it is American-dominated. Only three non-American novels have won the Hugo: John Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar*, and Arthur C. Clarke's *Rendezvous with Rama* and *The Fountains of Paradise*. (These are all British. There is some debate about whether to count William Gibson's *Neuromancer* as a Canadian win or not. Robert J. Sawyer may yet break this barrier.)

Nicholls said that his own canon changes from year to year as he rereads older works. Lately, Larry Niven has risen, while John Varley has declined in his estimation.

If there is a fan canon, it would be the Hugos. And contrary to popular wisdom, only about a quarter of it is hard science fiction. But it is difficult to get a canon from fan debate: "To find a fanzine that actually talks about books these days is rather rare, but that's another story." Still, he would put forth Poul Anderson, Lois McMaster Bujold, Larry Niven, and Connie Willis as being in such a canon. Michael Moorcock is popular only with those between 45 and 50. (Actually, I commented that a lot of the fan canon would be dependent on the age of the fans asked.)

Someone thought that Howard Waldrop should be in the canon, but Nicholls felt that one problem was that he writes only short stories, and another was that except for about four great stories, most of the stories were the same gimmick re-used over and over. I pointed out that Ellison also does only short stories, and would seem to be a candidate for canonicity. Someone thought Tim Powers did not get

mentioned because he wrote so few novels, but Nicholls pointed out that Powers wrote more novels than Connie Willis (eight to her six). Willis was someone, he acknowledged, who had made the canon primarily on the basis of her short stories.

Someone cited Harold Bloom citing T. S. Eliot saying that later generations of writers determine canonical writers by using them. Henry James lives on through the influence he has had on other writers, so perhaps the same will be true for Waldrop.

One audience member said that a canon is an academic idea whose origins are in the Church, and he did not like the idea of a science fiction canon. Another member suggested that perhaps the idea is not to let a hierarchy take over the canon.

Are We The Last Generation of Mortals: Eternal Life in Science, Religion and SF Thursday, 4PM

Damien Broderick, Alison Goodman, Chris Lawson (m), Robert Sawyer, Sean Williams

"A one-hour symposium on immortality and extended longevity with a group of scientifically-informed writers."

Lawson started by saying that there appeared to be three ways to achieve immortality: genetic engineering, nanotechnology, and virtual selves.

In genetic engineering, there have been advances in finding a "Methuselah gene" in fruit flies, and doing work with telomeres. (Telomeres are like aglets on the ends of DNA. Every time the DNA replicates it loses one, and eventually they are all gone and it cannot replicate properly. There has been some work done on restoring telomeres.)

Nanotechnology basically involves nanomachines repairing everything all the time.

The notion of virtual selves is based on Alan Turing's work: if human thought is a computable function, we can be emulated by computer. But is human thought a computable function, and is that the same? This area also includes Vernor Vinge's "Singularity" and Broderick's "Spike" which if I understand correctly are both when the rate of increase of knowledge/power becomes so high that humanity undergoes a quantum change. One non-fiction book recommended in this area was Frank Tipler's *The Physics of Immortality*.

Broderick said that he coined the term "virtual reality" and wrote about "transcendent technologies" in the book *The Spike: Accelerating into the Unimaginable Future*. Goodman said that she wrote "Dead Spiders", about self-created artificial intelligences. Sawyer wrote *The Terminal Experiment* about uploaded personalities. Williams said he was interested in the politics of immortality and Lawson was concerned with the ethical implications of biotechnology.

Broderick summed it all up by saying that the stake is in some sense infinite, and the idea is to not die. He first encountered this in Arthur C. Clarke's *The City and the Stars*, where the inhabitants were recycled back into computer memory and reborn in the future in a statistical way so they would be unlikely to meet the same people again. Broderick did want to distinguish, though, between uploading the mind and emulating everything in the computer versus uploading the mind and using robot bodies and/or receptors to experience the universe. He also wanted to distinguish between physical immortality and uploadability.

Goodman had been reading about the anti-aging industry. "We want to live longer but we don't want to age," she reminded us. The bottom line of all her research is that anti-aging techniques are currently very expensive--and dangerous.

Sawyer observed that not everyone wants to live forever. And what happens to *society* where

everyone lives forever--not just a few hundred years, but billions of years? He said that he can understand why *individuals* would want to live forever, but he cannot understand how it would be good for society.

He said that before he left Canada for Australia, he rushed to finish a novel--"not that I think I comprised quality, you understand"--because he wants to write a certain number of novels and time is limited. An unlimited amount of time means no pressure to get things done. What happens then? An audience member later went back to Sawyer's comment with a question Lawson summed up as, "If we have immortality, who will do the washing up?" Sawyer said that "part of being human is wanting to make and accomplish," but I'm not sure that addresses cleaning the windows.

Williams said, "I'm expecting to live for several hundred years, and I'll be really cross if I don't." He said, though, that it would be okay if his life span was finite, but he knew what it was. (I suspect if he knew it were another 3.7 minutes, it would *not* be okay.) He felt that what people wanted was control over both life span and quality of life. He also said he would upload himself and dump his body as soon as possible, to which Sawyer warned, "Everyone knows you never upload yourself into Version 1.0."

Sawyer agreed about the quality of life. He took a fourteen-hour plane flight, which he cannot remember at all, but he can remember the five minutes in the cave with the glowworms in New Zealand. Sawyer asked the question of whether people would rather live one hundred years with infinite resources or a thousand years on a subsistence existence.

Broderick said that talking about immortality was difficult because we cannot look into the far future (and never could). Williams said, "In the future, people will look back at us and laugh," to which Broderick replied, "We'll look back on ourselves and laugh," pointing out that Williams's statement shows how ingrained is the assumption that we will die.

Sawyer, talking about genetic engineering, asked, "If you rewrite what you are, are you immortal?" Or is it someone else? (The same, I think, could be asked about cloning, and other copying methods.) Someone else pointed out that your body is regenerating proteins now. Is this any different? And Williams said that people change themselves now, not just with physical operations, but mentally as well, by deciding to stop being an engineer and becoming an author, for example, or by changing their opinions on some topic. Are they a different person than they were, in the sense we mean?

Someone in the audience asked, "If we make our bodies immortal, where does the invincibility come from?" Sawyer suggested that you would become incredibly cautious--forget hang-gliding.

People's views on immortality change as they age. Broderick said, "I don't hate the flesh, but I don't like some of what mine's doing at the moment." (I can go along with that.) He suggested making several copies and making them a hive mind, so that if one dies it is not as important. (But is that true? Someone thought that it would be important to the one that dies.)

Someone else recommended Ray Kurzweil's *The Age of Spiritual Machines*.

An audience member asked whether immortality would not be limited by the proton decay of the universe, but Sawyer dismissed that as "mere engineering." He suggested you could solve that with a baby universe, pointing out, "You make a baby universe by Hawking one up."

Someone asked about having a finite memory in infinite time, and Sawyer agreed that in particular, if immortality is through cell regeneration, brain cells may lose their connections.

Sawyer also said that no one had talked about biological reproduction. If you stay young forever, how many children would you want? Even one every twenty years is millions. In response to several questions about the availability, and the haves and have-nots, he said there would be no more haves

and have-nots in a world where immortality was through uploadability (for example) because "the person you've pissed off is the person who can pull the plug."

(See also W. B. Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium," included in this report at the end of the panel on "Post-Human SF.")

SF Across the Media
Thursday, 5PM
Danny Heap, Ian Mond, Geoff Tilley (?)

"Most SF, TV and films make the same mistakes with story-lines and physics, again and again. Whose fault is it? Why is supposedly good science fiction still under the misapprehension that you can undo genetic manipulation in five minutes? And why do characters exhibit a new and useful capability in one episode that is never seen or referred to again? A lighthearted look at when budgets, networks and creators collide."

J. Michael Straczynski was supposed to be on this panel, but his plane was turned back to Los Angeles because of engine trouble and he had not arrived yet. I was impressed with the audience in that when this was announced, hardly anyone left.

The panel began by running a video in which Rod Serling is being interviewed by a very young Mike Wallace and talking about the great promise that television had. (I later read the last line of the quote from Serling saying, "The mass media is supported and sustained by commercial entities. And corn flakes and Shakespeare are simply not kissing cousins. Leonard Bernstein and living bras are incompatible. And you cannot sustain adult, probing, meaningful drama when the proceedings are interrupted every twelve minutes by a dozen dancing rabbits with toilet paper." It got one of the biggest laughs of the hour.)

Heap began by choosing one of the obvious shows to discuss, and said that *Star Trek: Voyager* had a lot of potential, but the production team made it bad. It has gotten better, he said, but "higher quality manure is still manure, and I'm still waiting for a rosebud."

Mond said that shows do take time to get better, and gave as examples *Star Trek: Voyager*, *Sliders*, and *The X-Files* (although some then went downhill again).

Heap then did a whole history of how fans viewed *Babylon 5* from season to season to which I cannot hope to do justice, but basically went like this:

- | -First season: "Wow, isn't this just the best thing you've ever seen."
- | -Second season: "The first season was pretty good, and this season is even better!"
- | -Third season: "First season so-so, second season good, third season great!"
- | -Fourth season: "First season was pretty bad, second season so-so, third season good, but this one was fantastic!"
- | -Fifth season: "First season really sucked, second and third seasons good, fourth season *great*"--and unfortunately I forgot what was said here about the fifth season, partly because by now everyone was laughing so hard.

Tilley objected to this, saying, "You don't say of a novel 'Chapter 1 was a bit sucky.'"

Tilley also said that what happens is that the producers cater to the lowest common denominator. Heap said that at Swancon, Lois McMaster Bujold said someone had optioned the first Miles Vorkosigan book. Now, in the book, Miles is deformed and under five feet tall (at this point someone in the audience called out, "Tom Cruise!"). The script she saw said in the margin, "short--five-foot-ten" (for the benefit of everyone else in the world that is about 1.8 meters instead of about 1.5). Luckily, Heap said, there is a clause in her contract about the "author's moral rights" so she may be

able to do something about it.

Heap also talked about the "killer plant" episode in *SeaQuest DSV*. He said that killer plants had been done well only in *Dr. Who's* "Seeds of Doom" and the BBC version of *The Day of the Triffids*, and this version was just a retread of a 1950s B movie. In fact, he said, *every* episode in season two was a 1950s B movie. Someone in the audience said that in some sense, all these current shows are remakes of older shows anyway (e.g., *Star Trek: Voyager* is *Lost in Space*, *The X-Files* is *Kolchak: The Night Stalker*, and *Space: Above and Beyond* is really *Combat!*)

Heap said that sometimes the writers guide tells you the problem: *V's* writers guide said it was "*Dallas*" in space, and "*All My Children* on Mars." On the other hand, *The X-Files* prided itself on *not* having a writers guide, and that was its downfall. The producers decided to give the fans what they wanted, so they would go to the Net after each show and see fan reaction. Fans (at least those fans posting) loved the conspiracy episodes, so the producers did more and more conspiracy episodes, but the conspiracies were inconsistent with each other and eventually the show made no sense at all.

Mond said there was good stuff out there also, and mentioned *Dr. Who* and *Star Cops*. *Sapphire and Steel* was described as "good atmospheric TV on a budget of less than ten dollars." People also liked *Lex* and *The Prisoner* (though Mond felt the expansion from thirteen to seventeen shows led to some of the more bizarre shows as filler).

Someone in the audience asked why the second season of a series so often turns to crap. The panelists said that it does not have to, but people get complacent, or they run out of ideas, or the show really had enough story for only one season. Heap also talked about "show cancer," which he said is when a series stops looking forward and starts eating its own history, recycling old villains and plot lines. And Tilley, again observing that media and books have a lot in common, noted that this "sophomore slump" happens in series of novels as well.

Fan Guest of Honour Speech
Thursday, 8PM
Bruce Gillespie

Bruce divided Australian fandom into "The Elder Gods, the Johnny-Come-Latelies, and the Babes in Arms" and spent most of his talk listing the first category, and why they should have been chosen instead of him as Fan Guest of Honour.

There was Graham Stone, who has been active in fandom almost sixty years, and who started the Sydney Futurians, but who fell out in the 1950s with Melbourne fandom for reasons that no one remembers any more (except perhaps Stone). (Stone later in the convention was awarded the Chandler Award.)

There was Mervin R. Binns, who sold science fiction in his news agency in Melbourne, and who started the Melbourne science fiction club, but who inexplicably has no entry in "The MUP Encyclopedia of Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy." He originated the Ditmar Awards, though Bruce added, "The Ditmar Awards have caused more trouble than any other aspect of Australian fandom for the last thirty years." He opened Space Age Books in 1971, in the same location as Slow Glass is now.

There was John Bankson, the first editor of the "Australian Science Fiction Review" and the originator of the Aussiecon One bid.

There were also John Foyster, Lee Edmonds, Ron Clark, Robin Johnson, and many other whose names I did not recognize. I suspect this talk was more meaningful to the Australian fans.

Live Thog's Masterclass

Thursday, 9PM
David Langford

"Thog's Masterclass is the most popular feature in the Hugo-winning sf newsletter 'Ansible' - showcasing those awful lines from sf and fantasy (including stuff by Famous Names) which barbarian critic Thog the Mighty believes are best appreciated with a morningstar. Dave Langford presents the best of the worst."

Langford said that these quotes were chosen for being "differently good." There were too many to include them all, but you can probably find most of them in *Ansible* and I have included a few here as samples.

Langford said that these fall into several categories:

- | Eyeballs in the Sky
- | Mysteries of Anatomy
- | Purple Prose
- | True Romance Department
- | See Nipples and Die!
- | Flowers of Rhetoric
- | Great Scientific Insights
- | Beats Me

Book blurb: "It took great courage to write this book--and it will take great courage to read it."

Another blurb: "These are full-length spine-tingling tales too scary to read in the dark."

From Stephen Baxter's "Star Beast"--"[Arabs who] fought with knives clenched between their teeth"

From Jack Dann's *The Memory Cathedral*: "His two missing teeth could be seen only when he smiled."

[Didn't catch from where this came]: "Their argument was a peripatetic orangutan, bouncing off the walls like a ping-pong ball in a wind tunnel."

From Robert Charles Wilson's *The Harvest*: "It was an Everest of an understatement."

From A. A. Attanasio's *The Dark Shore*: "Less than a day remained before dawn."

And at the end, Langford reminded all despairing aspiring writers that all his examples had been professionally published and paid for.

What sets this apart from the Kirk Poland Contest (in my opinion) is that Langford is willing to include the bad quotes of good authors, including people present at the convention. Everyone is fair game. And it does not involve trying to write more material in a purposely bad style, just pointing out that even the best authors have their off moments. I am, however, sure there are those out there who feel that this distinction is not a distinction.

Parties

There was really only one party, San Jose in 2002. It started at 9PM, and when we got there at 10PM, all the soft drinks were gone except for soda water, and the only coffee left was decaffeinated, but they still had liqueurs for it. They also had make-your-own burritos and other less elaborate snacks. By midnight the committee had blown their entire party budget (A\$3000) and had to cancel their

planned Friday night party. Still, the view over the river was fantastic, particularly when the torches by the casino belched flames.

From Canberra to Norstrilia: Cordwainer Smith
Friday, 11AM
Alan Elms

"A paper by the current SFRA President about how Paul Linebarger, a.k.a. Cordwainer Smith. In his two half-year sabbaticals in Australia, which he spent mostly at the Australian National University in Canberra, Linebarger took his observations of Australia and of what he regarded as the Australian Way of Life, and transformed them into the far-future myths of Norstrilia and the Norstrilians."

(I will use "Linebarger" when I am referring to the real person, and "Smith" when I am referring to the literary persona. If you do not like this, use a text editor to change it.)

Elms teaches psychology at the University of California at Davis. (And here I figured he was someone I would not have a chance to hear again! It turns out he has been giving talks on Smith other places as well, tailoring them to the location.)

He said that the major source on Cordwainer Smith was the (undoubtedly out of print) essay collection *Exploring Corwainer Smith* from Algol Press, many essays of which were by John Foyster and/or from the *Australian Science Fiction Review*.

Elms began by saying that the best-known future Australia is *Mad Max*. Norstilia is also a future Australia, but "You pays your money and you takes your choice, and most people have chosen *Mad Max*," Elms said rather sadly.

Norstrilia is set 15,000 years from now on Old North Australia, or Norstrilia. It has a dry, harsh environment but is fabulously wealthy because of a drug called stroon which extends human life. Norstrilia is populated by sheep farmers who raise "giant misshapen virus-infected beasts" producing this stroon, and who are trying to maintain an Australian way of life.

Linebarger was an American who grew up mostly in China, so the question is, why Australia?

Well, Smith wrote this as a "mythesized autobiography," sometimes to reward friends and punish enemies (as did Dante) and sometimes to work through personal issues (for which he was also seeing a psychologist), but also because he knew his life (in the diplomatic and intelligence services) included the stuff of myth because of his involvement with world events and world movers and shakers. This started early--his father worked with Sun Yat-Sen, and by the age of thirty, Paul Linebarger was already considered an expert on China. He had also lived in France, Germany, and England, and visited extensively elsewhere. During World War II, he passed briefly through Australia, which was "so much like California that it was hard to believe we had gone thousands of miles."

He went on to meet Mao Ze-Dong and the Communists in Yenan, and started a friendship with the Australian Michael Lindsay that would have profound effects on his literary career. In 1955, Lindsay invited Linebarger for a six-month sabbatical to Canberra. Linebarger wanted to revisit China and to do some covert intelligence work as part of his job, but he also wanted to learn about Australians, so he went, not just visiting Canberra, but giving talks all over Australia.

Linebarger was known for his wry humor, and Elms related that "Paul, who was blind in one eye, sometimes replaced his glass eye with one that displayed the Stars and Stripes." On this first sabbatical, Linebarger disliked only "the coffee, which would have nauseated a musk ox, and the bitter Australian winter." (This must have been Douwe Egberts, the coffee in all the hotel rooms. It is pretty bad.)

Linebarger liked Australia. In particular, he was afraid of the "Pleasure Revolution" in the America of the time and was pleased that Australia had so far resisted it.

Smith had started writing in 1950 with "Scanners Live in Vain", which was anthologized in 1952. He also wrote "The Game of Rat and Dragon" in 1954 (published in 1955), and while he wrote a little in 1955, he wrote nothing in 1956 or 1957. But he started thinking about "Norstrilia".

He began work on "Stark Raving Mad", about Arthur McArthur CLI (that is "Arthur McArthur the Hundredth and Fifty-First"), the direct descendent of the man who brought sheep to Australia. McArthur goes to the fleshpots of Earth, falls in love, and has adventures. But personal problems, including a burst appendix on a trip to Mexico, led Linebarger to take another sabbatical in Australia in 1957.

It was during this period that he wrote "Alpha Ralpa Boulevard" and "The Ballad of Lost C'Mell," and began work on *Norstrilia*. In *Star Craving Mad* (an unfinished manuscript that formed the basis of *Norstrilia*), he had started with the Norstrilians as tough, honest, and not too bright, but he changed this to how they "looked as simple as sheep but their minds were as subtle as serpents." He patterned Lord Redlady after Michael (Lord) Lindsay, who was married to a Chinese woman and supportive of Communists. The HonSec was the ANU vice-president who has caused his friend Lindsay much difficulty. McBan's wealth now came from the "ancient family computer's manipulation of the galactic stock market," a parallel to his stock broker Mr. Greenish. He also changed an agnostic Eagle Man to someone now leading a Christian revival, possibly because of Linebarger's own recent brush with death and return to religion.

Linebarger desired another Australian sabbatical and even thought of retiring there. The stories of this time reflect Linebarger's exhaustion. For example, "A Planet Named Shayol" had been originally named "People Never Live Forever." In 1965 he went there again, and also New Guinea, Indonesia, etc.

He finished his final story "Under Old Earth" and published the first half of *Norstrilia* as *The Planet Buyer*, and the second as *The Underpeople*. He also went back in China to receive an honorary degree, but on 19 December 1965 had a stroke and died less than a year later.

Someone asked, "Why a wealthy Australia?" Elms said that Smith was not trying to be prophetic, and was too friendly to Australia to be ironic. It was just a dramatic contrast.

Where did he get the Outback from if he spent his time in the cities? Well, he did drive through a lot of the continent, but also occasionally in the manuscript said "Old South Australia" by mistake (as if from "New South Wales"). Also, Smith also used the Chinese rather than the Aborigines as a basis for some of his characters.

In response to another question, Elms said that Linebarger apparently kept his Linebarger and Smith identities separate. (Perhaps a future Worldcon panel could examine the parallels between Smith and Tiptree?)

Someone asked about the name "Cordwainer." Cordwainers are leather workers, higher than shoemakers, which were in turn higher than cobblers.

Regarding story titles, Smith acknowledged that Frederik Pohl was a better creator of titles than he was, and did not object to Pohl's changing of his titles.

And in response to a final question, Elms said that the political and psychological roots of Lords of the Instrumentality are an amalgam of the British Empire, the Chinese empire, and Sun Yat-Sen.

Friday, 2PM
Greg Benford, Richard Harland, Perrienne Lurie, Brad Lyau

"There's surely no one single way in which science enters SF--but many different angles of use. Sometimes the 'science' is no more than a literary convention that is used to circumvent other impossible barriers to story (e.g., faster-than-light devices, time machines, inter-dimensional scenarios, etc.) Panelists provide a historical survey from Mary Shelley to H. G. Wells to the American genre of today, and argue the merits of 'hard science' versus 'wild science.'"

Harland, who described himself as writing science fantasy, began by saying that science, just as science fiction, involves a jump of imagination. But he felt that in science fiction this jump does not have to be as grounded in possibility as in science. The example he gave was that in a realistic novel about Sydney he thought it does not matter if the street names or the distance to Melbourne are wrong. Everyone picked up on this, and later he did actually explain that he meant something much more limited than this. (See, I have started using literary devices like foreshadowing too.)

Lyau is a historian and writes about history of science. He began by saying that he was talking about *science* fiction, and will take Isaac Newton as a starting point for the science. He said that during the time of Newton, Leibnitz questioned whether gravity existed, and Newton responded that all he claimed to do was to measure observable phenomena; he never claimed to know what causes phenomena. This separated science from theology and philosophy. Also, Newton talked about the categories of space and time, and this figure in some of the panel's observations.

Lyau cited Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *The Year 2440* (written in 1770) as the first Utopian novel set in the future. Everyone knows about Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), whose introduction claimed that it was based on (then) recent discoveries. Jules Verne used new discoveries and ideas, of course, and H. G. Wells, in *The Time Machine*, covers both space and time. (See, I told you.)

Lurie thought that science fiction should strike a balance between the suspension of disbelief and a sense of verisimilitude. She said that she certainly notices the mistakes in fields she knows. If it is clearly not intended to be serious science, it is okay, she said, giving as an example a Terry Bisson story about baggage handlers stealing people's unused time. But she did not like Robert Charles Wilson's *Darwinia* because the explanation at the end did not convince her. Benford said, "I always thought that *Darwinia* was a metaphor for Australia. Suddenly Europe disappeared and there were all these strange animals."

Benford said, "You need to use physics in a novel the way you use firearms--you need to get things right." He explained that he had once read a story in which shell cases ejected from a revolver were a clue, and he asked when the character being attacked (and consumed by a monster) would have had time to eject them.

(Someone noted at this point that that the panel was actually arranged in the order of strictness-- Benford, Lurie, Lyau, and Harland.)

Benford described a lot of what he reads as "wantum mechanics"--the way the author wants it to work, rather than the way it does. A parallel, he said, was a poem with seventeen lines that does not rhyme. It is not a bad sonnet--it is not a sonnet at all.

Edgar Rice Burrough's *At the Earth's Core* is being re-issued by an academic press (it is in public domain), and Benford was asked to write an introduction, so he re-read it. The book starts with the main character drilling exactly five hundred miles radially inward and finding Pellucidar. Benford observed at this point that round numbers always sound wrong scientifically. (Okay, how about "Just short of 805 kilometers, they broke through"? For the conversion-challenged, I will point out that it is the same thing.)

Burroughs has lots of numbers, but it is really just a dream landscape novel. Scientifically, it is all off. In a hollow shell, gravity would not point outwards--there would be no gravity at all. However, there is also a little sun in the center that never sets, and this sun would actually pull everything in to it. Burroughs presumably cared, because he had lots of numbers, but he did not ask a physicist. "How can you fix this?" Benford asked rhetorically, and then answered, "You can't." But good physics is not the aim of the piece. As Benford said, there is "a lot of tap-dancing to get you through this show, but there is no music," but it does get you to the dream landscape with it. Another example he gave was Gernsback: the set of real inventors working alone to create amazing things as in *Ralph 124C 41+* is a set of measure zero.

Benford noted, "It is often said that the goal of hard SF writers is to write a story that gets turns into a patent application." Rigor is like "how well do you want your steak done?"--it is a matter of taste, and he said, "I'd rather have tennis played with the net up."

Harland clarified his earlier statement on street names by saying he meant something like having the main character's address on a fictional street, but the rest would be accurate. Something fictional can fit within a factual world.

Lyau said that alternate history and time travel often get some things right, but the rest looks like whenever/wherever the author was writing. The example he gave was a (hypothetical) time travel story to ancient Britain where the clothing and swords are described perfectly, but the politics is modern American politics.

Someone in the audience asked, "Is using science fiction to teach science a good thing?" Benford said that he had taught a course this way, but you must choose your stories (and your lessons) carefully. He used Larry Niven's "Neutron Star" to teach tidal mechanics, for example, but more as example to have the class calculate that the solution would not work. (He added that this was "the only story I've seen in which the proper response to a hard science problem is to curl up into the fetal position.") There was also Jerome Bixby's "Moons of Mars," in which there are tiny moons orbiting Mars about twenty feet above the ground. "Even arts majors can see there's a problem here somewhere." Harland pointed out that many of the thought experiments used to teach relativity are science fictional (e.g., riding a beam of light).

According to Lyau, John W. Campbell said, "Science fiction is the hors d'oeuvres; science is the main course." Benford asked, "What's the dessert?" and an audience member called out, "Engineering."

Someone asked, "What if Pellucidar's sun had a negative mass?" Benford was not sure what was meant by that but said, "Anti-matter has the same gravitational sign--but I don't think that has been empirically established."

Someone noted that Niven concentrated on the social and economic consequences of teleportation without looking at the technical aspects.

I asked Benford to name some authors who "played with the net up." He listed Paul McAuley, Stephen Baxter, and Greg Egan, adding, "They all play with the net up and sometimes it's so high you can't get the ball over." Charles Sheffield was mentioned, and when Lurie noted these were all men, Catherine Asaro, Nancy Kress, C. J. Cherryh, and James Tiptree, Jr., were added. A name noticeably absent was Hal Clement, which may have been an oversight, or maybe it is just that he is not really writing any more.

In a more general comment about accuracy in novels, Benford said that fantasy never seems to come from real experience (sitting a horse, drawing a bow, plowing a field). "A lot of fantasy seems to have been written by somebody in a suburb with a four-wheel drive, but who never leaves the road."

Lurie said, "I don't want to read patent applications, I want to read stories." They need plot, characters, and so on. In other words, the "fiction" part of "science fiction" is important also.

Australian SF
Friday, 4PM

Russell Blackford, Damien Broderick, Steven Paulsen, Dirk Strasser, Janeen Webb

"When did Australian SF start up? Who are the major figures in its history and now? What's hot and what's rot? Get all the answers to these and other questions from our panel of experts."

Judging by the big wall of Australian science fiction in Dymocks, I had figured the panel would have a lot to work from, but I am not sure they did, or at least did not talk about it much.

Blackford started with some basic recommendations. Paul Cohen's *The MUP Encyclopedia Australian Science and Fantasy* is comprehensive from 1950 on, but also controversial. Its major lack, though, is material from pre-1950. Russell Blackwood and Sean McMullen's *Strange Constellations: A History of Australian Science Fiction* covers from the 19th century through 1998, but has no fantasy or horror, and omits most young adult works. It is also expensive.

There is Jack Dann and Janeen Webb's *Dreaming Down Under*, an original anthology covering all the major Australians except Greg Egan. David Hartwell and Damien Broderick's *Centaurus* is a reprint anthology, and has no fantasy or horror.

Webb added Terry Dowling's *Antique Futures* and Stephen Dedman's latest book, *Foreign Bodies*, to the list.

Paulsen asked, "Is this a "Golden Age of Australian science fiction and fantasy"? There is more writing, more being published, and more being published overseas. And there is more support from Australian publishers as well. There have been two volumes of Jonathan Strahan and Jeremy G. Byrne's *Year's Best Australian SF and Fantasy*, as well as Judith Raphael and Lucy Sussex's *She's Fantastical*, and Paul Collins's *Metaworlds*, *Dream Weavers*, and *Strange Fruit*. In magazines there are *Aurealis* and *Eidolon*. I would also add *Alien Shores* edited by Peter McNamara and Margaret Winch. (However, Strahan told me later that they cannot find a publisher for volume three of *Year's Best* because the sales for the first two were disappointing.)

Strasser, who edits *Aurealis* with Stephen Higgins, said all this started in 1990, when both magazines started and the then-existing magazine "Aphelion" launched a small press. He thought then maybe a Golden Age was coming. Now there is Mirrodance Publishing, Ticonderoga Publishing, Altair, Harbinger, etc. Part of what has helped the small press is that it is technologically easier to make books in the 1990s. Also, the major publishers have started to publish Australian authors; Pan Macmillan started this, and the others followed suit.

Broderick said there was a lot of emphasis on a "Golden Age", but science fiction had been around for a while. *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy* from John Carnell started to come to Australia at the end of the 1950s. Aussiecon One in 1975 was seen as a watershed because of the Ursula LeGuin workshop, but it did not catch fire. Aussiecon Two in 1985 had a workshop, but there was "still no substrate to patch yourself in to." It has been only recently that there has been a real science fiction movement in Australia.

I asked, "What's rot?" and the answer was "magazine filler," even though the two main magazines are only semi-annual.

The panelists agreed that selling to a United States publisher is better. The United Kingdom is good also; that is where Egan built his market. (But a later panel said this was very difficult.) One problem

is that a United Kingdom contract often includes "Commonwealth rights," which would preclude a separate Australian publication (at least until November).

Two books mentioned recently published as mainstream but really science fiction were *The Deep Field* by James Bradley and *The Letter Girl* by Andrew Masterson.

The Good Soldier: George Turner as Combative Critic
Friday, 5PM
Bruce Gillespie

"The image of the trustworthy soldier dominates George Turner's fiction and criticism. In his criticism, he declared from the beginning (1967) his intention to make war on the assumptions he believed science fiction readers held about their favourite reading matter. He believed these attitudes were destructive to the genre and unworthy of those who held them. His combative attitudes led to many unintended side effects. Bruce Gillespie examines some of George's attitudes, and tries to assess the true place of Turner's criticism in the SF field of the last thirty years."

Gillespie described George Turner as someone who "showed equal condescension and attention to everybody" at Aussiecon One. And Turner had not yet published a word of science fiction, only criticism and reviews. Combative though he was (or perhaps because of it), he welcomed negative reaction to his criticism

His first article, reprinted in the Programme Book, was "The Double Standard," and in it he attacked Alfred Bester's *The Demolished Man* in a deliberate attempt to annoy readers. Turner said of the novel:

"The book won a Hugo. One can only surmise that either the year was a poor one for novels, or that the judges were hypnotized by the snowstorm of style and movement. The book is a triumph of style over content and inconsistency. It was, unfortunately, the kind of book which encourages serious critics to regard sf as irresponsible and unimportant, and its readers as sadly lacking in discernment."

(For the record, other novels competing with it included Robert A. Heinlein's *The Rolling Stones*, C. M. Kornbluth and Frederik Pohl's *The Space Merchants*, Jack Vance's *Big Planet*, and Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano*.)

While this did generate negative reaction, however, it did not generate as much as Turner remembered. (One suspects that some of his memories may have been wishful thinking.) By the end of the 1960s and in the early 1970s, Gillespie said, overseas readers must have had a strange view of Australia as "a land overflowing with kangaroos and SF critics." And Turner had decided that he was going to impose a higher standard of criticism on the world.

In 1968, Turner divided the field into reviews, review articles, and criticism. His "Rules for Reviews" (slightly paraphrased) were:

- | The basic part of a review is a description of the work.
- | It should be based on what is attempted and whether it succeeded or failed.
- | Your personal like or dislike is not important.
- | Your personal reaction will appear, but it should be judicial and balanced.
- | Be careful with quotations.
- | Don't nitpick.
- | Don't attempt criticism in a review.

He also dismissed the work of all the critics at the time as not worthy enough. But he was taken aback by the vehemence of reaction in fandom. "I hadn't learned that fandom operates only at the top of its

voice."

Gillespie said that when reading Turner one is reminded of Turner's mother, who demanded constant rebuttal even long after she died, but also the teacher's voice.

He had definite opinions about criticism. "Only firmly established targets should be assailed." "The ultimate target must be standards, not individuals, but if one individual must bleed, let it be one of little importance to the genre."

His opinions were most vociferous on works about soldiers. *A Young Man of Talent* and *Yesterday's Men* were based on his World War II New Guinea experiences, and *Genetic Soldier* was also about soldiers. To Turner, a soldier was not a "do-or-die hero or a brainwashed robot"; he was the "boy next door doing his best to stay human under conditions the rational mind rejects."

So in his 1973 review of Robert Silverberg's *New Dimensions I*, he took Gardner Dozois to task for "A Special Kind of Morning" in which Dozois, who had no military experience, wrote about a soldier. But Turner had read Dozois's anti-war story as anti-soldier, and completely missed the point.

In 1988 John Foyster praised Lucius Shepard's *Life During Wartime*. Turner responded to that review that Shepard was not writing about war, but about the human ego. "What he was writing about war would leave a large margin on the back of a postage stamp." Shepard in turn responded that Turner's claim (that no one with any real war experience would have written it) was belied by the favorable reaction to *Life During Wartime* among Vietnam veterans. Turner basically could not recognize that there might be a war experience different from his own.

Turner also wrote at least two definitions of science fiction that opposed the writing and reading of fantasy because it allowed people just to make things up instead of using logical extrapolation or common sense.

Gillespie summed all this up with, "The essence of the argument is based on what he considers reality." Turner never said "I think" or "I believe" before making a statement. In part, he did this to annoy, but also to defend his view of reality.

As Gillespie put it, to Turner, "[Philip K.] Dick's work failed because Dick didn't have the same view of reality that George had. In fact, Dick questioned the whole idea of reality itself."

Turner could be wildly inconsistent. He berated "New Wavery" but picked Brian Aldiss, Thomas Disch, and Ursula K. LeGuin as the most interesting writers of the period.

He did change his viewpoint a bit after he started writing and realized (according to Gillespie) that "it was harder to reach the ideal than he had ever considered before."

At the end, Gillespie mentioned the possibility of getting the first series of *Australian Science Fiction Review*, which carried much of Turner's criticism, on the Web or back in print.

My impression was that George Turner sounds a bit like an Australian Harlan Ellison. (And he did not like Ellison either.)

Time Travel, Time Scapes and Timescape: A Symposium
Saturday, 10AM
Gregory Benford, Russell Blackford (m), Damien Broderick, Alison Goodman,
Sean McMullen, Aubrey Townsend

"A two-hour symposium about the physics and metaphysics of time travel, the problems of writing time travel stories, and the variety of solutions attempted by sf writers."

Broderick noted that this year's Aurealis Award nominees were slanted toward time travel. There was Sean McMullen's *Centurion's Empire* (novel), David Lake's "The Truth about Weena" (short story), and Goodman's *Singing the Dog Star Blues* (young adult). (Lake had also earlier written *The Man Who Loved Morlocks*.)

The basic starting point is that problems and paradoxes arise as soon as there is backwards communication. Along with this come profound implications regarding free will and determinism. *Timescape* uses a branching timeline to avoid this, but Townsend, for one, questioned whether this makes sense.

Townsend began by saying that the best science fiction is driven by ideas, not by miracles or magic. He wants a story to have a coherent conception of a possible world, because our enjoyment lies in appreciating the underlying coherence. (In "A Sound of Thunder," Townsend admits, Ray Bradbury deliberately violates every rule, but this only works because the rules exist in the first place.)

With accelerated travel to the future, there is no risk of paradox or incoherence, because there is no foreknowledge, but you still have the dislocation in being removed from one's time that authors use for creating a sense of isolation in a character.

But travel along time as a dimension allows incoherence and paradox. In a sense the future that a time traveler travels to seems already determined, since it was there when he arrived. And returning from the future means he can remember things that have not yet occurred.

It is still possible to be coherent, however, if one disallows travel into the traveler's own local past or future. The only example that Townsend knows of which allows this and still works is the film *Twelve Monkeys*. But the traveler there is seeking knowledge from past, not trying to change it.

Using branching timelines solves this problem also. They allow an event to happen and not happen simultaneously. But this means the traveler cannot return to own track. In "A Sound of Thunder" the travelers seem to return to a track in which they are still expected back--in other words, a non-branching structure.

In *Timescape*, according to Townsend, replies to messages would have to come from a branch that does not lie downstream from the sender. Our expectations and tensions center around the single-branch model, and collapse when the branching occurs or is revealed.

An audience member suggested that maybe there is a single timeline which is plastic (the time traveler can continue to change the future even if he does not exist in the past anymore) or elastic (the timeline "recovers").

Townsend said this was reminiscent of the stories in which time travelers to the past change things, and then "Time Lords" fix them. But in any case, no model deals with the idea that something both happens and does not happen.

Another person said that special relativity says that different observers see different things, so why is consistency important? Townsend said that physics does not allow inconsistency, and any theory that does is invalid (in his opinion). Benford said that there is a distinction between logical inconsistency and physical inconsistency. Until you observe the cat in Schrodinger's experiment, it is not both a live cat and a dead cat, but the potential for both which exists simultaneously. McMullen thought that what was being referred to in the question was that special relativity and changing the frame of reference changes the sequence of events, and Benford responded that as far as that went, simultaneity issues do not create causal problems.

McMullen said that the panelists were asked for papers under 1000 words; his paper was 999 words. His grandfather was a Scottish engineer, and his grandmother a French medium, so his background

regarding scientific rigor was interesting. He stays within the laws of physics because there is so much scope there, and because boundaries (like the 1000 words?) keep you honest. But he also said, "Science fiction is about telling stories; let's not forget that"

"The simplest way to achieve time travel is to stop aging," McMullen said. In *Centurion's Empire* he invented the "human-powered time machine": a village that maintained the time vault for the travelers. They would be revived as needed and then frozen again. The result is a normal life span lived in slices. As with many "Lazarus"-type stories, this means they cannot form relationships with normal people, because they know they will outlive everyone.

McMullen felt that there was some scientific precedent for all this. North American painted turtles can survive with half their bodily fluids frozen and with no heartbeat. (Hibernation is different because bodily functions continue and food/fat is consumed.)

Relativity says time slows as speed increases, so that is also often used. But time travel can be intensively subjective. Oliver Sacks's *Awakenings*, for example, has young people in old bodies because they have been in a coma for many years. Other mental problems (e.g., the loss of the ability to assimilate long-term memory) have a similar "time-travel" component.

McMullen also talked about the world "slowing down" or "speeding up." Snails see at four frames a second, flies at 1200 frames a second, and humans at 24 frames a second. So what appears fast to us is very slow to a fly. (I am not sure I completely understand or agree with this.)

There are also other means to communicate with the future: time capsules, books, etc. In McMullen's own "The Colors of the Masters" a character invented sound recordings and then used those. In *Centurion's Empire* people send love and hate into the future as a family meme. However, when McMullen spoke of this as "attempting to tamper with the future," I was reminded of the point made in Michael Flynn's *In the Country of the Blind*--we all try to tamper with the future. Otherwise, why do anything?

H. G. Wells did use a two-way time machine well in his book, but McMullen does not like a two-way time machine used just for the purpose of putting a character in a setting.

An audience member asked the panel's opinion of the time travel in *Babylon 5*. McMullen said that it was similar to Wells's structure and used as a plot device. Benford admitted, "I have never watched *Babylon 5*, except for about twenty minutes of an episode that Harlan Ellison forced me to watch." McMullen added (of time travel in general), "Once you start to push it, the rivets really start to come loose in the hull."

Returning to paradoxes, Gerald Nordley asked, "What if the communication doesn't eliminate the message-senders?" Townsend replied that the paradoxes are not there because of big changes, but because there is still an inconsistency. Benford disagreed, saying there is not really a physical contradiction even in those cases. Only one of those events can be measured and verified. For example, if you go into the future and send a message back telling someone to bet on a certain horse, and he does and gets rich, the only evidence that he did not get rich is the memory of the sender--and that is not measurable.

Regarding *Centurion's Empire*, Lawrie Brown suggested that if you freeze your best thinkers, doesn't that stagnate the civilization and cause its downfall? McMullen's response was, "Congratulations, Lawrie, you're the first person to catch that, and it's been hidden in the book [all along]." This book in fact is in part his explanation for *why* Rome stagnated.

Goodman used events in a "four-dimensional space-time manifold" in her young adult novel *Singing the Dog Star Blues*. "I'm a time theory tart," she said. "I will use any theory that works in a story." But the theory she uses has to be coherent and logical, although she added, "My parameters are

occasionally fuzzied for my convenience."

As Douglas Adams said, "The trouble with time travel is not the math, it's the grammar." *Singing the Dog Star Blues* is told from a first-person point of view in the past tense, but from about a week after the events ended. However, for the sake of suspense, it is told as if it is presently happening. The protagonist believes herself to have free will, but does not know everything. She has no foreknowledge, but two other characters do.

Goodman sees fiction as an artifice that uses devices. She quoted Thomas Hardy ("A novel is an impression, not an argument.") and Somerset Maugham ("A good rule for writers--do not explain overmuch."). But she said the best summary was from Commander Janeway (on *Star Trek: Voyager*): "My advice for making sense of temporal paradox is simple: don't even try."

I asked about the panelists' opinions of Robert A. Heinlein's two classic time-travel stories, "By His Bootstraps" and "All You Zombies" Goodman said that for the former story to work, the protagonist needs to be kept drunk. Benford noted that while both stories deal with complex time travel issues and multiple simultaneous copies of people, they are psychodynamically very different. But he said there are no paradoxes in either. (One audience member said, however, that "All You Zombies" is "biologically impossible.") Benford also mentioned a related story, David Gerrold's *The Man Who Folded Himself*.

Someone asked whether time loop stories have to have entropy work backwards. For example, in "By His Bootstraps," the protagonist has to make a perfect copy of a dictionary. Benford responded that it only has to be perfect *typographically*. But thermodynamically, he said, you cannot have time travel without redefining the system boundary.

Should the author explain the science? Goodman took a middle ground, saying that the reader wants to know the rules, but clearly you cannot explain it completely or we would have time travel. Broderick said he really liked the part in *Timescape* where Benford "explains" that they need to aim the tachyon beam into the sky where the destination *was*.

Someone mentioned S. M. Stirling's "Island in the Sea of Time" series, where the entire island of Nantucket is thrown back into the Bronze Age. This is not explained so far; is this okay? Goodman said that it depends on the writer. (Mark Twain did not much explain his time travel either.) Someone suggested that this was the difference between science fiction or science fantasy. (See also Robert Charles Wilson's *Darwinia*, not for time travel, but for the general notion of explaining an inexplicable event.)

Broderick said that his book *The Dreaming Dragons* was based on reading Kip Thorne's *Black Holes and Time Warps: Einstein's Outrageous Legacy* about billiard balls and wormholes and getting his ideas from that.

[Broderick has pointed out that I must have written something down wrong, because his novel was written in 1978 and came out in 1980, and Thorne's book was more than a decade later. Mea culpa.]

He had three general observations on time travel stories. First, "events in a story with a time travel trope need to be read quite literally without equivocation." They are not symbolic. Second, "we enjoy image-ing the world." Things do not always match our desires or images. This is described as the "make it didn't happen" wish. (It sounds a lot like alternate history, even without time travel.) And thirdly, "the time travel trope is less moralistic or earnest than any of this suggests."

He sees a lot of stories as being "time travel for the sport of it, time travel as a logical tease." So is time travel "unworthy of academic discussion, far too fun-loving and carefree"? No, because as Frederic Jameson said, "SF is, in its very nature, a contemplation on history itself."

Time travel raises the whole question of a deterministic universe. Broderick thought that chaotic events might not be predictable, but some things such as physical laws might be. String-theory has been described as a kind of mathematics that has fallen out of the 21st century; he suggested that maybe it has.

Someone asked about the television show *Seven Days* and the "Back to the Future" movies. Regarding the latter, Benford said that "a subtext in much time travel is an anxiety about identity," which is why characters are concerned about meeting themselves. He also said that much of this anxiety about identity in all types of fiction is "profound irrationalities masquerading as moral fiction." As an identical twin, he sees much of the concern about cloning as completely irrational. He is an exact copy of someone else, yet he is an individual and so is his twin.

Benford mentioned that David Deutch has said that much of his (Deutch's) work is based on his reading *Timescape*. Benford noted that in Deutch's theory, the "production of a paradox produces the splitting of the universe," but that it only splits if a paradox occurs. So "you can bring about a better universe, but you don't get to live there. That is the tragedy of the novel." You can get a theoretical knowledge that another (better) world exists, but cannot go there. (This sounds vaguely mystical in nature.)

Townsend said that he had no problem with the many-worlds interpretation, but he was worried that that model was being mixed with another. Every time travel story has a bit of a miracle (usually the machine itself), and perhaps we should allow backwards communication in the same spirit.

Someone asked, "In time travel stories, if the hero can change the world, others can change it back, so what's the point? And if he can't change the world, what's the point? And multiple worlds mean you help someone else, but can't help yourself." Goodman said, "I suggest you stop reading them." And Benford, commenting on being able to help only others, asked, "I wonder how you feel about life insurance" (which pays off someone else if you die).

Benford noted in closing that science fiction author and physicist John Cramer says that every transaction is a time-modulated handshake in two directions, so by that theory, we actually have time travel now.

An Hour with Robert Silverberg
Saturday, 12N
Robert Silverberg

This was not described in the Pocket Programme, but was basically a chance for the audience to "interview" Silverberg for an hour.

Silverberg began by saying he was glad to be "back in [his] ancestral homeland." He said that the Hebrews were an early Australian tribe (according to "The Lost Books of Genesis") and only when Moses determined that kangaroo and wombat were not kosher (in "The Lost Books of Deuteronomy") did they leave. He commented on Australia's "ever-expanding cities" (he was first in Australia in 1975).

(The questions are all summarized rather than direct quotes. And I tend to bounce back and forth between first- and third-person in the answers. Live with it.)

Q: How did you feel about collaborating on "Nightfall" the novel?

A: "Damn strange." "[Asimov] was rather miffed that a story he wrote when he was twenty-one remained his most popular story for his entire life." But Silverberg said it was a "fascinating experience." He did something similar with C. L. Moore's *Vintage Season*, though he retold that from

a different viewpoint from the original. He said more specifically that it was a fascinating experience as a mature writer to take a story he has known from childhood and to rewrite it.

Q: How do you maintain your enthusiasm over writing?

A: Silverberg said he was getting a bit tired. The peak of a writer's (or any artist's) power is usually around age 45, so what he wrote twenty years ago enthuses him more, and he does not have the vitality and intensity of twenty years ago. The major exception he cited to this age thing was Giuseppe Verdi, who wrote *Otello* at age 75, and then *Falstaff* after that. And Clifford D. Simak was 77 when he won his last Hugo. [He was the oldest author to win a fiction Hugo, but Jack Williamson and L. Sprague deCamp both won Hugos for their memoirs when they were older: Williamson at age 78 for his memoir, *Wonder's Child: My Life in Science Fiction*, and deCamp at age 90 for his, *Time & Chance*. Thanks to Laurie Mann for this information.]

Q: Your current books are more upbeat than those of the 1970s--why?

A: Part of the reason is that the market has changed, "mostly for the worse." Everyone wants upbeat endings. But as an established author, Silverberg does not find this a major limitation--his publisher wants to know only what his next novel is called (to start advertising it), and is not worried about the plot.

Also, the 1970s were particularly chaotic--both on a large scale with Vietnam and on a personal level for him. The 1990s are not chaotic.

But Silverberg also said that there is a lot he does not want to know about his writing process because it would block him, much like the centipede who analyzed how he walked and ended up not being able to do it anymore.

Q: Could a book like *Dying Inside* be published today by a new author?

A: "I don't think it could be published today by me." Well, Silverberg conceded, it might, but it would not do very well. On the other hand, Hollywood *is* looking at it, and it *is* being reprinted.

He said that after he wrote it (a book about a telepath), a woman came up to him and said, "I just read *Dying Inside*. I didn't know you were one of us." To which he could respond only, "If I were one of you, you would have known it by now."

Silverberg thought that these days maybe the small press would publish this, adding "I'm not pleased with the shape of most modern book publishing in the United States." There is, he said, a "thin stratum of brilliance floating on a great sea of ..." I mentioned Sturgeon's Law, and he said, "Sturgeon's Law at least granted us 10%."

Q: What are the pitfalls and how do you avoid them?

A: "Talent, skill," But more seriously, Silverberg said that you need to keep growing as a person, to keep your ego out of the picture, and not to worry about reviews, awards, or money (except as necessary to pay the rent and buy food). He said that his approach is to "write SF as well as I know how and have as many people as possible read it,"

Q: Have you been influenced by Jack Vance?

A: Silverberg said that while he admires Vance greatly, and Vance's *Big Planet* was an inspiration for Majipoor (where Silverberg tried to cover more of the planet than Vance did), he feels that his writing does not have much of the "Vancean" flavor.

Q: What will you do if the movie version of *Dying Inside* is as inaccurate to your novel as *Starship Troopers* was to Heinlein's?

A: Silverberg said he needed to make one thing clear: "When you sell a book to Hollywood, you're selling it. You no longer own it." He went on to say, "They'd have paid me hundreds of thousands of dollars and I'd live with it."

Mel Gibson was/is doing *The Man in the Maze*. Someone wrote a screenplay and showed it to Silverberg. It was an entirely new story built around the central concepts of the maze and the self-imposed exile and isolation of the protagonist. Silverberg said that it was good, but it was not the same as his novel, and he never would have thought of doing it this way. He would have done a linear adaptation of the book. *The Book of Skulls* has also been optioned, but the screenplay he saw for that was "appalling."

Q: How do you happen to be in *Amanda and the Alien*?

A: That TV-movie was adapted from the Silverberg short story. He had met the director twenty years ago when the director was then about seventeen, and the director told him he was going to film all of Silverberg's works. Silverberg was skeptical, but when this film came about, the director invited him first to watch the filming and then be in it in a non-speaking role (so they would not have to pay him). "The process by which a movie is made is interminably dull," Silverberg said. His scene involved him being a supposed UFO abductee on a talk show, and though he did not get to speak, the scene did involve him getting a backrub from Jessica Hahn.

Q: Some of your recent books seem to be expansions from earlier short stories--what draws you back?

A: The only one that Silverberg could think of that fit this description based on his own story was *Starborne* from a 1973 story. He described it as "channeling myself instead of Asimov or Moore." "The usually perceptive" Gary K. Wolfe in *Locus* saw it to a hearkening back to the space opera days of the 1950s rather than the 1970s, though.

Silverberg also admitted that he has reworked other stories as well, at least partially. Jorge Luis Borges in "The Library of Babel" had one sentence about someone being declared invisible for a year, and Silverberg used this as the launching point for his story "To See the Invisible Man."

Q: You seem to know, if not everything about everything, then a lot about a lot. What is your formal and informal education?

A: Silverberg has a bachelor's degree from Columbia University. (He did not say what in, though.) He has also written a lot of non-fiction that involved quite a bit of research. Each book, he said, was like doing a doctorate and producing a dissertation.

Q: What 1990s authors do you read and enjoy?

A: "Actually, I don't read much science fiction any more." Silverberg is not impressed with the current state of science fiction, though he said that Kim Stanley Robinson would have been a great author in the 1940s. But there is too much now to follow; it used to be possible to read *everything* that came out. He described himself as a "fastidious reader and harsh critic." He wants good prose and punctuation as well as story and characterization.

Also, he said, "Do I really need to read an alternate history of Venus when I haven't read *War and Peace* yet?"

Q: Do you plan to write more historical or archaeological novels?

A: Silverberg said his stories in a parallel Rome are "a sly sidewise way of writing historical fiction." A novel about Prester John is also a possibility. (He has already written a non-fiction book about him.)

Q: Given the state of medicine and dentistry in ancient times, why would any of the characters in *Thebes of the Hundred Gates* want to stay?

A: Silverberg's only answer was that some people would choose to stay in spite of that.

Q: Will there be more non-fiction?

A: "I don't want to write non-fiction any more." It is hard work, and also he is tired of explaining things.

Q: What about your essays for *Asimov's*?

A: "That's not non-fiction, that's fun."

Q: Can you juggle?

A: "Not any more. I learned for *Lord Valentine's Castle*." But the last time he juggled was in 1979 and it is a skill you have to practice.

Q: How do you look back on the days when you were turning out your enormous volume of work?

A: "With astonishment." Silverberg was writing thirty to forty pages of publishable material a day (on a manual typewriter!). How did he do this? "As you can see from today, I speak in complete sentences; I speak lucidly." This talent let him write quickly and coherently, but he does not have that kind of energy any more. "What I lack is the discipline and the motivation to drive myself the way I did in 1967." He also said, "It's just an innate knack. The fact that you can't do it just means that you're someone else."

Q: As you grow older, is it possible that you slow down because you appreciate the shades of gray more?

A: "I wrote *Dying Inside* [which he considers his best novel] in nine weeks and I thought that was a very slow performance." But at this stage, Silverberg said, he would rather write a few good stories instead of many mediocre ones.

Q: What is your favorite story of yours, or what was different, or a watershed?

A: Silverberg thought "To See the Invisible Man" (1963) was the first to have that "Silverbergian tone." He also likes *Thorns* (1966). And *Dying Inside* had been mentioned as what he thought was his best.

Q: Is the word processor intimidating?

A: Silverberg said that he was doing seven drafts of each page when he switched over, so "it was with great relief" he switched to a word processor. There was a lot less crumpled paper lying around. But he admitted that sometimes doing changes rapid-fire means that freshness is lost.

Q: Where do you see yourself going now? How do you continue to grow?

A: "I'm a very restless man. I've never actually written a real trilogy. ... I can't nail myself to one place

for that long."

Q: Are you a solitary person or do you get inspiration from others?

A: Silverberg was an only child, and is moderately gregarious, but said he deliberately chose a profession where he could work alone at home.

Q: What is interesting, motivating, and fun?

A: The essays for *Asimov's* were the first thing Silverberg mentioned. He has not written anything else in six months, but he will be back writing in November.

Q: How does your solitary nature affect your collaborations?

A: "The panel on collaboration is tomorrow."

Q: What do you read?

A: Silverberg reads classical literature (he is currently re-reading the plays of Euripides), as well as history and biography, poetry, and science.

"Deep Time: How Humanity Communicates Across Millenia"
Guest of Honour Speech
Saturday, 1PM
Gregory Benford

Benford was introduced with the story that when the Aussiecon Three committee called him to ask him to be Guest of Honour, he asked whether he was the Pro Guest of Honour or the Fan Guest of Honour (since he started fan groups in both Germany and Texas). Benford then added that he also could have been the Science Guest of Honour.

He said he could remember the Guest of Honor speech of the convention of "19-ought-and-68" (in suitable old voice), when Philip José Farmer went on so long that he had "several members of the audience expire." At first Benford thought it was from old age, but it was a combination of the heat and the drugs. Benford said that that convention was the "most druggie convention I attended--or at least can remember" and he commented particularly on the hog tranquilizers being given out in the hallways. In his speech, he said, he would try to be more brief than Farmer.

How long is a long time? More than a thousand years implies a loss of cultural continuity. There are only a few small exceptions, and nothing near 10,000 years old. Forget language.

What comes to us from antiquity? Two sorts of messages: "High Church" (lofty) and "Kilroy" (graffiti). Regarding the latter, Lord Byron scrawled his name on a beautiful Greek shrine; tourists now come primarily to see the graffiti. And we know the names of a lot of Roman soldiers (and prostitutes) because of the graffiti by and about them.

So how can we make a warning marker to speak to people across 10,000 years (which is the length of time it will take our radioactive waste to decay to the level of the background)? We basically want to send one message: "Bad juju!"

And how can we convey meaning to future humans or aliens, on a spacecraft marker, to last for a billion years? All we can really say here is, "Hi!"

What truly lasts? And why do we keep trying?

Benford told the story of Victor Hugo on holiday right after a new book of his had come out. He had no contact with bookstores (Benford's definition of a holiday for writers). and wanted to know how it was going. So he sent a telegram saying merely:

"?" -Hugo

and the response came back:

"!" -publisher

Benford described this as the shortest and highest-density information exchange in human history. But it is atypical, because it uses symbols we understand but which will not last.

The message conveyed by Great Pyramids is basically "We did impressive things." Much of what made them great or useful is gone: treasures looted, gold caps stolen, limestone facing removed. ("The pumps don't work and the vandals took the handles," as Benford put it.) But it is the only remaining one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. There is not even that message from the Sphinx--we do not know how old it is, whether it ever had a nose or when it lost it, or anything else. Benford thought it delightfully ironic that the Sphinx does not speak in any form.

He talked about ancient Irish tombs. At least we think they were tombs; all we know is that they used heavy materials that were very difficult to move, but we do not even know for sure they are tombs. Sometimes they have meaningless markings--at least meaningless to us.

The Pantheon in Rome is still there, because Romans made the best concrete ever. But it is 1800 years old, not 10,000 years old (which would take us back to the start of civilization, at least defined as when towns were formed and grain was counted).

Stonehenge has stones weighing 54 tons which were transported 24 miles 3400 years ago. It works as a clock, but what was it really for? There was a mania of henge building thousands of years ago--why?

No museum or library from ancient times has survived intact. As Benford said, "Put ye not your faith in the standard method of keeping messages." Institutions do not last.

As for the current puzzle, nuclear wastes are stored in salt flats because salt is a fluid and the flats, having been there a billion years, should last another half-billion as well. So 2200 feet down they bury the wastes, but they want to warn future generations.

Benford digresses into how this decision of where to bury the wastes was made. You need certain physical characteristics (high thermal conductivity, plastic behavior, and something strong but easily mined), geologic stability (tectonics, hydrology), and something widely distributed. Subduction zones in ocean would be better, but are not politically feasible.

So the government wanted something safe and marked for 10,000 years (the time to decay to the level of the surrounding rock). There should be a discernible marker. First rule: Do not use anything fancy or someone will steal it. (Benford gave the example of the Mausoleum, another of the Seven Wonders and the last to disappear, the materials carted off by the Crusaders to build a castle.)

But even with a marker, people will still drill, so the committee Benford was on told the government that there was a 10% risk of this. They did say that whatever they came up with was guaranteed or your money back (in 10,000 years). Also, a marker on the surface is not enough; we need to warn mole miners as well. For this they proposed magnetic markers in an orderly pattern to indicate something artificial.

Benford said that there are two strategies. One, build a big thing (Cheops). Two, cover the evidence and forget it. The latter is what worked for King Tut. Tut died of a poisonous snake bite when he was about nineteen. ("In ancient Egypt there were a lot of poisonous things around, and nothing more poisonous than politics.") So they buried him and then immediately began work on the next pharaoh's tomb. They began by digging a hole near Tut's tomb and throwing the tailings on top of Tut's tomb, figuring to remove them later. The next pharaoh ruled for a long time, and by the time his tomb was used, three generations of slaves had passed and no one remembered that they had covered up another tomb. So it stayed hidden.

As with Egyptian tombs, a marker might actually encourage people to drill. So Benford suggested a marker subject to minimum-bid negotiations. This would result in a marker that only lasts a hundred years or so. This idea was not well-received.

Several more serious suggestions meant to convey the ideas of "artificial" and "danger" were big and spiky granite blocks, a "valley of thorns" (but they will fall down, and could get dulled by erosion), a spike field with information kiosks that also produce a long mournful note when the wind goes through them, spikes bursting through a grid (signaling discontinuity and an interrupted pattern), a black hole surfaced with black granite that would get hot from sunlight (but nomads might stay at night for the retained heat), a rubble landscape (but plainly artificial), forbidding blocks (irregular so they do not stack, spiked, and really large), and menacing earthworks with a map of world showing danger sites. Someone in the audience later said all this sculpture looks like post-modern art, which Benford said was the reaction of some of the artists on the panel as well.

The kiosk would have laser-cut messages such as expressions of horror and dismay, as well as an English message (and most other languages as well). and the radiation trifoil. Again, the message is "something man-made and dangerous," as well as who, what, when, where, why, how, and all the details.

There will still be problems, of course. An existing site had a plaque put on it on a large rock about thirty years ago. (The plaque, by the way, had "GLENN SEABORG" on it in big letters, but no useful information.) The problem was that it was not there any more. It turned out that grazing cattle used to scratch against the rock, it being the largest thing around, and had actually moved it several miles by their accumulated pushing.

There would also be more advanced messages twenty feet down, including a periodic table (shades of H. Beam Piper's "Omnilingual"), an astronomical calendar which would indicate when this was built, and further details.

Facial expressions as messages seem to be useful (even chimpanzees recognize these). Well, useful in communicating with future humans, anyway. One claim is that a precessing circle of constellations with decreasing warnings and changing facial expressions gives you the time scale for when the site is safe. Of course, that could be what the meaningless markings on the Irish tombs are trying to say. (Studies, by the way, have shown that the skull and crossbones is often interpreted as "pirate treasure-dig here.")

As for physical design, Benford, "Almost any damn thing you do is going to draw people because it's big. But you don't make it high."

His other project in communicating with (well, to) the far future was the Cassini Spacecraft. This was to have a diamond disk that would last a billion years. What should it have? Well, first, it would use visual patterns rather than sound or any other format. And he believes that there is a natural selection for pattern recognition (the person who recognized that the rock went in a parabola was going to be more successful at hunting and pass this "pattern-recognition" gene on to his or her descendents). So there were a variety of patterns and schematics, diagrams of the solar system, as well as a stereoscopic photograph taken at a beach which managed to include both sexes and various "racial" types, naked

and clothed, stationary and walking, with water and land, and so on. (I am sure you can find a picture of all this if you want so I will not waste a thousand words. Actually, in this context, a picture is worth an infinite number of words.)

People are also working on a library of life to preserve as information--freezing everything from a given hectare of land, from bacteria to macrolife. (I guess the message for our time is: Do not stand there while they are collecting.)

Benford said that science fiction is really the only viewpoint aware of the passage of great time spans, and the only place where such issues are regularly considered.

Benford closed by saying, "The most profound message we leave for future generations is the world." Do we have the hubris to go out and knowingly adjust the parameters of the world? We have to, because we have been doing it unknowingly all along.

And why do we do all this? We do this because we have a sense of our mortality and a sense of the continuity of human culture. In other words, "Kilroy ain't going to be here, but Kilroy was here, whoever Kilroy was."

Other Awards Ceremony Saturday, 5PM

As I noted earlier, this had four time changes, and three room changes, and was referred to as the "Permanent Floating Award Ceremonies" by organizer Marc Ortlieb (who can now go off and have his nervous breakdown in peace).

Without further ado, the awards were:

Australian Science Fiction Achievement Awards (Ditmars):

- | William Atheling, Jr., Award for Criticism or Review: Paul Collins, *The MUP Encyclopedia of Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy*
- | Professional Artwork: Nick Stathopoulos, covers of *The Man Who Melted* and *Dreaming Down Under* (Nick then passed the award to Shaun Tan, saying that Tan deserved it for *The Rabbits*. Tan's rather surprised reaction was "Oh, gee, thanks, Nick!")
- | Fan Artist: Ian Gunn
- | Fanzine: "Metaphysical Review", Bruce Gillespie
- | Magazine/Anthology: *Dreaming Down Under*, Jack Dann and Janeen Webb (who said "This belongs to the authors, but we will keep them [the awards].")
- | Short Fiction: "The Truth about Weena," David J. Lake
- | Long Fiction: *The Resurrected Man*, Sean Williams

Chandler Awards (Australian Science Fiction Foundation):

(For these there is no set period, no voting, etc. It is just given as called for.)

- | For Long-Term Contribution for Science Fiction in Australia: Graham Stone

Sidewise Awards (Alternate History):

- | Stephen Fry, *Making History* (His agent sent the following: "Stephen is filming on location in Spain. He is thrilled, delighted and honoured and only sorry that a hectic filming schedule has prevented him from accepting personally.")
- | Ian MacLeod, "The Summer Isles" (He sent the following: "I've always enjoyed that special branch of SF known as alternate history, and it's been a pleasure to me that I've sometimes

found the inspiraion to write a little of my own, of which 'The Summer Isles' is undoubtedly my most serious effort. I hope the story, like all good SF, and especially alternate history, tells us a little more about ourselves, and sheds a little extra light on the particular alternate in which we find ourselves living. My only regret is that I can't be standing here in person to thank you for your support, and the tremendous encouragement which your award gives me. My thanks go to you all, and especially to Gardner Dozois for helping me develop the story into the final form in which it was published.")

E. Everett Evans Award, a.k.a. Big Heart Award (Forry Ackerman):

- | -Peter Hassell (New Zealand)
- | -Chris Collier (Australia)

(Chris Collier was completely unknown to committee or anyone else, so they were going to contact Ackerman to find out who he is.)

Golden Duck Awards (Children's/Young Adult):

- | Picture Book: *Noah and the Space Ark*, illustrated by Emma Chichester-Clark, written by Laura Cecil (This award is considered as going to the illustrator.)
- | Middle-Grade: "Star Wars: Young Jedi Knights" series by Kevin J. Anderson and Rebecca Moesta
- | Hal Clement Young Adult: Larry Segreff, *Alien Dreams*
- | Special Award: Garth Nix

Seiun Awards (Japanese fan awards, similar to the Hugos):

- | 1998, 37th Japanese National Convention, 29th Seiuns
 - | Novel in Translation: *Fallen Angels* by Larry Niven, Jerry Pournelle, Michael Flynn, translated by Osamu Asai
 - | Short Fiction in Translation: "The Death of Captain Future" by Allen Steele, translated by Masahiro Noda
- | 1999, 38th Japanese National Convention, 30th Seiuns
 - | Novel in Translation: *The Time Ships* by Stephen Baxter, translated by Naoya Nakahara; "Red Mars" by Kim Stanley Robinson, translated by Yutaka Oshima (tie)
 - | Short Fiction in Translation: "This Year's Last Class Picture" by Dan Simmons, translated by Yoichi Shimada

(There were two years' worth because the 1998 awards were announced *after* the Worldcon last year, and so could not be announced there. The newsletter did not include the names of the translators, but Marc Ortlieb included them in his report to Muke Glycer's *File 770*, so thanks to both of them.)

Hugo Awards Saturday, 8PM

- | Best Novel: *To Say Nothing of the Dog*, Connie Willis
- | Best Novella: "Oceanic," Greg Egan (*Asimov's*, Aug 1998)
- | Best Novelette: "Taklamakan," Bruce Sterling (*Asimov's*, Oct/Nov 1998)
- | Best Short Story: "The Very Pulse of the Machine," Michael Swanwick (*Asimov's*, Feb 1998)
- | Best Related Book: *The Dreams Our Stuff Is Made Of: How Science Fiction Conquered the World*, Thomas M. Disch
- | Best Dramatic Presentation: *The Truman Show*
- | Best Professional Editor: Gardner Dozois
- | Best Professional Artist: Bob Eggleton
- | Best Semiprozine: *Locus*, Charles N. Brown, ed.

- | Best Fanzine: *Ansible*, Dave Langford, ed.
- | Best Fan Writer: Dave Langford
- | Best Fan Artist: Ian Gunn
- | John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer (Not a Hugo): Nalo Hopkinson

Of the winners, only Langford and Brown were present. The ceremony was over in a record (?) 78 minutes (counting from the official start time--even less if you consider it started about 10 minutes late).

The Hugo itself was a bit strange. The base was supposed to look like Ayers Rock (Uluru), but the color was off, and it looked rather like something from an alien autopsy instead. In addition, Mark questioned whether it was not in somewhat poor taste, since Uluru was a sacred site. He asked, "What would people think if the Hugo was Calvary with two crosses and the rocket between them?"

Of the Hugo Losers Party, let me just say that it may be time to change the name to the Hugo Losers, Volunteers, and a Whole Bunch of Other People Party. Obviously, the hosts (traditionally next year's Worldcon) can invite whomever they want, but calling it the Hugo Losers Party when the vast majority of people there are not Hugo losers, or even nominees, seems foolish. (Actually, when I talked to someone from Chicon 2000, it turns out that they did not intend to have all these people there either. It was a combination of people over-enthusiastically handing out invitations, no general parties opposite it, and the ability to walk in without an invitation by coming in through the riverfront "porch.")

A Twist in Time: Alternative Histories

Sunday, 10AM

Ginjer Buchanan, David Lockett, Evelyn Leeper (m), Andrew McRae

"When Hitler won the war and JFK was never killed, it was a twist in time. Histories other than ours."

[Thanks as always to Mark for taking notes for this.]

McRae has a master's degree in science fiction. (I did not realize you could get those.) Buchanan is the senior executive editor for Ace Books. Leeper just reads the stuff. (Her degree is in math.)

Leeper started by saying that the term she was used to was "alternate history," but Brian Aldiss did not like this because it sounded as if they were taking turns.

The first thing that is asked about alternative histories "is it really science fiction?" Lockett thought it was because science fiction is about the effects of changed technology on society. Leeper was not sure she agreed that there was always a change in technology. Buchanan said that the time travel aspect common to a lot of alternative history makes it science fiction. Though time travel and alternative history are different, they often wind up looking similar but from different premises.

Leeper quoted Harry Turtledove's explanation: "Science fiction writers write it. And it uses a very science fictional technique: change one thing and extrapolate from that."

McRae said that what he found interesting is that alternative history shows how arbitrary decisions are. Leeper suggested two types, one which revolved on the arbitrariness of decisions, and one which relied on time travelers or other less arbitrary means, giving as an example of the latter Turtledove's *The Guns of the South*.

Buchanan said it had been a long time since she read it, but the standard seemed to be Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee*. (Leeper noted that there was time travel in that.)

Leeper said that if there is a time machine then it is obvious that the story is science fiction, but a

book like Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* is less obvious. Perhaps there is just a spectrum, rather than a sharp dividing line.

Leeper apologized for so many references to books about the American Civil War, saying that it was the second most popular turning point, the first being "what if Germany won World War II?"

The distinction was made among alternative histories, parallel worlds, alternate universes, and secret histories. The latter are most often incorrectly called alternative history and are when there is some past which does not match our understanding of history, but could have happened and been concealed. Examples of this would be Michael Flynn's *In the Country of the Blind*, the "Illuminati" books, and so on.

Leeper mentioned what is probably the classic Australian alternative history, A. Bertram Chandler's *Kelly Country*, saying it was how she first heard of Ned Kelly.

Luckett said the best he had read was L. Sprague de Camp's *Lest Darkness Fall*, in which a time traveler goes to the year 416 and introduces technology as Rome is close to crumbling. He tries to invent gunpowder but fails because he does not know the formula (a delightful change from the time traveling hero who conveniently knows everything--though de Camp does have his hero know Latin). He does have other technologies, and the whole book asks "what if Rome did not fail, fade, or crumble; would technology make a difference?" But Luckett pointed out that Rome had technology, had the steam engine. Constantine did not want a road-maker that replaced 300 slaves; what would he do with the 300 slaves? Contrary to what many Marxists think, you cannot just add a technology.

Leeper said this was part of the whole "Tide of History" versus "Great Man" theories--can a single individual redirect things? A Marxist would say no. But in some sense it really does not matter which you believe if you are willing to suspend your disbelief for the sake of the story. (Is this the equivalent of "playing with the net down"? I do not think so. History is not an exact science and its events are not repeatable.)

Luckett asked what the twentieth century would be without Edison, and suggested there would be lots of little Edisons. Leeper pointed out that there were--he just managed to appropriate all their ideas.

Buchanan said that in contrast to stories dealing with the introduction of technology, you have a book like Robert Harris's "Fatherland" in which Hitler wins. The book is a mystery set in that world, a world in which one person makes a big difference. The best time travel novel she ever read is Jack Finney's *Time and Again*. It is not hard science, but mostly nostalgia, the premise being that if you can go to a place that has not changed over time, and you can get in the right psychological state, you can go back. She said it was wonderfully evocative, even with such a suspect premise.

Leeper said that another classic "what if Germany/Japan won the war" was Philip K. Dick's *The Man in The High Castle*. Buchanan said that, like *Fatherland*, this was a book that many people outside the genre liked. Leeper said that another "mainstream" book similar to *Fatherland* was Len Deighton's *SS/GB*. A unique book is Robert Sobel's *For Want of a Nail*, which is written as a history of North America, complete with fake footnotes, a fake bibliography, and possibly even a fake copyright page. (It is frequently found in the history section of bookstores.) Each chapter parodies a different academic style. It is truly unique.

McRae liked Howard Waldrop's "Fin de Cycle," saying that Waldrop excels at putting the reader back in time, and has researched the details of the end of the last century in France. Leeper agreed, but said that many of his stories have a sameness, and they are about literary characters unfamiliar to most science fiction readers (e.g., Thomas Wolfe). McRae agree that Waldrop's readership was limited by the level of background knowledge required.

Buchanan said that the reason why Harry Turtledove is popular is that people instinctively recognize

when someone has done his homework. The best alternative histories make you feel comfortable that what you are told is true. On the other hand, she said, it is clear that Jean Auel is making it up as she goes along, though it still works as a romance. But people like Turtledove and Harris thought through the implications.

Leeper said that part of this readability is also what you pick as a departure. Aliens landing during World War II is pretty obvious. And most Americans know something about the American Civil War. On the other hand, Waldrop has done his research but it is about things people do not understand.

An author can get around this "background knowledge" problem. Leeper gave the example of John M. Ford's *The Dragon Waiting*, which turns on the adoption of Christianity. The change point is not immediately obvious but the blurb will tell you. On the other hand, Turtledove edited an anthology called *Alternate Generals* where each story had an introduction explaining (or at least stating) the premise, but when the book was printed the descriptions got lost and were not included. As a result, several stories were incomprehensible.

Someone said that what is necessary is to follow the premise down a logical line and not cause disbelief. Leeper said this could also be a trap. Silverberg's "Roma Eterna" stories are logically extrapolated, but by the time you get to a period 1500 years later or more, everything is so unrecognizable that you might as well be on another planet. On the other hand, Harry Turtledove and Richard Dreyfuss's *The Two Georges* has a change in the 1770s, but Martin Luther King and John F. Kennedy still exist in the twentieth century, albeit in slightly different roles. This gives the reader something to connect with, but is unlikely in the extreme.

Luckett said that it was plausibility that mattered. (Will Shetterly's Rule: "There are no correct alternate histories; there are only plausible alternate histories.") However, just as humorous science fiction does not have to use completely rigorous science, humorous alternative histories do not necessarily have to be plausible. (See Scott Cupp's "Thirteen Days of Glory" for an example of this.)

Luckett mentioned a story of his in which the submarine is invented thirty years earlier (earlier than what was the question), there was never a British fleet in World War I, and we never learned that war could be unlimited.

Someone asked for the worst alternative histories the panelists had read.

Leeper said that the one she found most offensive was a "what if Hitler won" which seemed to be used just as an excuse for violence pornography. (It was *not* Sarban's *The Sound of His Horn*, nor was it by any well-known author.) She said that others had often named John Jakes's *Black in Time*. But much of the worst we do not see, because the publishers save us. The worst are probably from the vanity presses.

Luckett said that the worst are either clumsy or offensive and that never reads more than three paragraphs of them. There are only so many brain cells. One that he did remember (though not the title) was a novel where Richard the Lionheart and Saladin not only had a homosexual relationship, but set up a castle together.

Buchanan had nothing to cite specifically, though she thought Jean Auel might qualify as alternative history fantasy to prove a political point rather than be realistic. The result is that history is distorted, and that bothers her when it is about periods she knows something about it. On the other hand, she is not bothered by Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*, even though things are pushed in ways to make points, because Bradley's Arthur is subject of myth, not history.

Someone mentioned that in Britain there are academic studies involving virtual history and alternative history, without mentioning the field. Leeper said that they are often called counterfactuals, and that that was the background Sobel came from. Often these seem to be fairly short, however ("even shorter

than a Fred Brown story"). Buchanan said these are often in books on military history, and Leeper mentioned one such, Harold Deutsch's *What If?: Strategic Alternatives of World War II*.

An audience member asked about "inadvertent alternative histories," books were written about the then-future, but which time has caught up with. The best-known recent one is probably Norman Spinrad's *Russian Spring*, but all science fiction set in the future is destined to become alternative history in this sense. Someone else asked about history books with factual errors (such as saying the atomic bomb was used in Korea). In both cases, they are not really alternative history; generally the author must be *intentionally* writing alternative history.

Leeper said that her husband had pointed out that *all* historical novels are alternative histories. For example, Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* is an alternative history because Rhett Butler never really existed. Buchanan suggested an even better example would be Alexandre Dumas's *The Three Musketeers*, which has definite alternative history aspects because of the fictional characters involved in major ways in important world events. (Arthur Conan Doyle's "Sherlock Holmes" stories, and even more so his imitators, often do something similar.)

Commenting on what people believe about history that may be wrong, Buchanan said that her traditional Catholic education left her ignorant until college that there were reasons for Protestant Reformation (which her Catholic schools called the Protestant Rebellion and attributed to a desire to have to say prayers less often).

McRae said that history is always up for grabs, and someone responded that history is always written by the winners. Buchanan disagreed, saying that we have an enormous number of journals and letters from both sides of the American Civil War.

(I must admit that this was one of the worst panels I attended, partly because of insufficient preparation on my part--I will plead the excuse that I was incommunicado for the three weeks before the convention and the topic was not even firmly fixed when I left--and partly because it is the same old alternate history panel that is always done. If I learned one thing at Aussiecon it is that one needs to do fresh panels. Mea culpa.)

**Posthuman SF
Sunday, 12N**

Gregory Benford, Russell Blackford (m), Andy Butler, Joe Haldeman, Helen Merrick, Maureen Kincaid Speller

"A two-hour symposium about, the compatibility of literary values and the scientific materialist view of human nature, the post-human fiction of Greg Egan and others, and the future of sf."

Blackford began by stating that Greg Egan has consistently expressed an "austere philosophy of scientific materialism," and places this at the core of his science fiction. So how does a writer like Egan cope with the knowledge of being a materialist being and still keep writing?

The particular stories Blackford referenced were Egan's "Reasons to Be Cheerful" and Brian Stableford's "The Pipes of Pan." Of the latter, critic Rob Latham claimed that "the logical result of this technological implication is frankly risible." (The technological implication is that of altering our beings from the premise of scientific materialism or reductionism.) Blackford said that the fallacy in Latham's argument is that Egan is not the behaviorist Latham thinks he is.

Benford said that Guest of Honour George Turner had talked about the "revelation of strangeness in familiar things" and this was particularly appropriate to this topic. "What is more familiar to ourselves than ourselves?" He observed, "Science has atomized experience, the better to analyze it," and suggested that "doing this to people seemed quite fruitful." But all is not roses. "Alas, we are not simple systems."

"Humanism," Benford said, "is fundamentally folk psychology." If our selves run us, what about the unconscious (and the "instinctive")? For example, what part of us controls our breathing when we speak so we do not run out of breath before the end of the sentence? Where do ideas come from? He felt that Marvin Minsky's view of our mind is better than the autonomous self ruling from above, in spite of all the images of disembodied intellect that appear in science fiction. But "if our selves are solely information and can exist independent of the substrate of matter," what then?

Well, Egan, McAuley, and others use the "War in Heaven" strategy: the conflicts of god-like beings in a world above our own. Benford's own *Foundation's Fear* has reconstructions of Voltaire and Joan of Arc in a similar vein. But Benford does not believe that intellects can be disembodied, because they rely on our nervous systems. He talked about "the alien feel of our self as information" and asked, "What would we be like if we could intervene directly in our own minds?" Referring to us as the result of the "Darwinwings of evolution," he suggested that "self-knowledge could lead to an existential nausea. ... We do not understand emergent properties [and] cannot predict the outcome of truly complex systems." On the other hand, self-knowledge could lead to an appreciation of ourselves as not amenable to emergent rules at all.

In the end, Benford said, much of this speculation is not relevant in fiction because "we demand some being to actually *be*." (This almost sounds like an echo of St. Anselm's "proof" of the existence of God.)

In response to a question from the audience, Benford summed up, "I simply do not believe that there is a remote chance that everything is knowable about the mind" or the universe. He also said, "A technology that has no limits basically destroys narrative, because then everything is possible."

Someone in the audience mentioned some of Oliver Sacks's work about the self without information. Sacks says, "Isn't it interesting that if you take out this piece of the brain, you lose this ability? And if you take this other piece out, you lose this other ability?" Benford said, "The real trick is the integrative properties [of the brain]."

Someone asked about a parallel between disembodied selves and aliens. Benford replied, "The thing about aliens is that they are truly alien, and [we risk] alienating our audience by losing our narrative center." In other words, people have no one to identify with.

Speller said that she approached the question of "What will become of humanity?" All the fiction seems to assume that something will happen, that we can affect it, and that it will be good. "People are coming to believe they have an inalienable right to cheat death and live forever." She described this as a desire to "transcend an existence circumscribed by flesh," and asked whether this was not a Utopian dream. Who maintains this new existence for them? Totally loyal and reliable servants are needed. (This echoed Robert Sawyer's comments on the immortality panel earlier.) "Choice is governed by material wealth and that is no choice at all."

What we are being shown here is the ultimate experience, but entirely solipsistic. "What happens to humanity in the trans-human condition? Do we then hunger for less control and more authenticity? Do we then seek to transcend the transcendent?"

An audience member asked how we should define human now that we have IVF and such. Is a baby a product because you can tailor it? Benford said that although some "tailoring is possible, you will never know exactly what you are getting with a child," and that for a long time, genetic engineering will be all about editing out. Editing in will add a whole new issue. Merrick felt that all these techniques are in demand because women's humanity is still based on the ability to produce a child. Benford polled the panel: "How many people on this panel have produced a child?" Haldeman's response was, "I'm not sure," which strikes me as much more honest (and perceptive) than the "traditional" approach of interpreting this as "How many people on this panel have produced a child in a religiously and socially acceptable manner?"

Someone said, "If you have a mind within the body, are they distinct? And can you live outside your body and still be you?" The panel said that these questions were not just about science fiction, but went to the heart of Western philosophy.

Butler began by examining the term "post-human." It could not just be parsed mechanically. (He related being asked in a class who the pre-Raphaelites were. Having not read the assignment, he responded that they were the people who came before the Raphaelites. This was *not* the right answer. And he has been told by various people that "post-modernism" was either a continuation of modernism or against modernism, or (even more confusingly) "to be modern, something must first be post-modern." So "post-human" is either a continuation of human-ness, or a rejection of human-ness, or that which is not yet human. And Butler examined each of these definitions in turn.

If "post-human" implies a continuation, this could be through bionic means, cybernetic means, or transmigration. Butler gave the robot in Ken MacLeod's *The Stone Canal* as an example. This continuation deals with the resilience of human spirit.

If it is a rejection (for example, a rejection of current limitations in order to exist in extreme environments), we have another example in MacLeod's work, this time in *The Cassini Division*; we have the "fast folk." Downloading (or is it uploading) our personalities into computers is similar, and these rejections tell us what we fear most.

And if "post-human" is that which is not yet human, we have some bottom-up design, e.g., digital codes manipulated to create a consciousness. Again, in MacLeod, this would be the consciousness in *The Sky Road*. Or it would be Frankenstein creating life from putting organs together (as opposed to life as the result of a human spark).

But in all cases, we describe post-humans from the point of view of humans. Is this a failing of the human or because we see the post-human as something evolving from humans? But all this comes back to the question, "Is individual behavior reducible to electro-chemical reactions?"

An audience member mentioned *The Boys from Brazil* and the Law of Unintended Consequences. Another asked about software piracy of post-human beings ("keeping a copy of Greg Benford or Joe Haldeman in thrall to write science fiction novels"). Who owns you? There are precedents, with some engineering genes owned by multinational corporations. (Is this also hinted at in "The Truman Show"?) Blackford was not sure this was slavery, saying, "We shouldn't anthropomorphize computers, because they might resent it." (Laughter.)

Benford, however, reminded the audience that identical copies (twins) are separate entities now. However, the idea is intriguing. As he said, "Endless ground for stories is the first thing I think of." And Haldeman noted that the production of children has traditionally produced something akin to slaves anyway.

Benford said that whenever someone suggested making copies of people which would be identical to the original, Benford asks them, "If I can name at least one characteristic which is not retained during this process, will you agree that the copy is not identical? They all fall into the trap, he said, and agree. And then he asks them, "What about uniqueness?"

Someone said that science fiction fans are among the few accepting all this. This may sound elitist, but Benford did agree, saying, "The first reaction of the bulk of the population to any new change [in medicine] is 'Yuck!'"

Merrick titled her paper "Post-Humanity: The Only Game in Town; The Material Girl Strikes Back" and said that this is actually already a topic in academia and elsewhere, and that this symposium signals a merging of fields.

Rob Latham had referred to "the seductive lure of the post-human," where "post-human" refers to a "vision of human existence where information revolution had exploded the mind-body dualism." It "challenges the universality of human subjectivity." The body may not disappear, but the concept of the body as a separate part of a mind-body dualism will. In this there is a similarity between cyborgs and post-humans; both challenge liberal assumptions.

But this focuses on the self/other dichotomy to the exclusion of all others. Does a post-human have race, gender, etc.? And all this is very much "privileging the human" and avoids the messy details of living in a human society.

Someone thought that science fiction is about the core of what makes us human, and asked how all this might relate to Iain Banks and the Culture. Is that a utopia or a dystopia?

Butler said that Banks sees the Culture as close to a left-wing Utopia that works. But Benford said that the very fact that it calls itself "*the Culture*" implies totalitarianism. (Aside: One thing that always bothered me about *Babylon 5*: Would a government refer to *itself* as a regime?)

Another person observed that we have been trying to engineer our children for a couple million years, just not as well. Haldeman thought that we do not do this except for the obvious, but Benford said, "It's obvious from the dating game that some selection principle is being acted on by all of us."

Another question was whether there was an invariant of consciousness? Is the person who dies at age 70 the same as that person when he was born? Benford said that this is known as "The Continuity Problem." Consider if Fred has an operation that involves basically stopping his bodily functions and then restarting them. After the operation, Fred wakes up and says, "I'm Fred." But if he "died" on the operating table, is he? Haldeman described this by saying, "It think it's Fred." But Benford insisted, "There's only one authority on Fredness in the universe, and that's Fred."

Regarding the constant change we undergo, Haldeman said, "You can never step in the same river twice," and Benford responded, "But you can pee in it twice."

Extrapolating even further, Haldeman noted that there is no continuity between quantum time-lengths. Therefore, he said, "You are a bunch of Benfords" over a time spectrum, not a single Benford. But Benford said that there is a continuity on the conscious level; "continuity is only an argument over which derivatives you keep."

Regarding all this, Haldeman pointed out, "Asking a present-day human to speculate about the post-human condition is like asking an infant to speculate about life as an adult." He said that if you ask a toddler what is meant by "love," "home," "God," "work," "play," "time," "fear," or "death" (words that are actually in the child's vocabulary), you will get very different answers than from an adult. "Now try 'sex,' 'anxiety,' 'despair,' or 'ambition.' And then 'existentialism,' 'carbon-carbon cycle,' or 'dèjà vu.'"

Haldeman also said that neither "Reasons to Be Cheerful" and "The Pipes of Pan" were meant to be predictive, but were rather metaphorical tools. Latham's review seemed to take the stand of "it's good, so it can't be genre" and also assumed that Egan and Stableford were being predictive, and was wrong in both. (Haldeman gave the examples of his own stories "Anniversary Project" and "None So Blind" as similarly metaphorical rather than predictive.) He agrees that the author is not privileged in interpreting the story, but "Stableford is using his considerable literary skills" to illustrate a point, and "Reasons to Be Cheerful" is "a story that Kafka might write today, if Kafka read *Lancet* and *New Scientist*."

Someone asked why the transition in science fiction from wanting to be cyborgs to wanting to be disembodied intelligences? Merrick did not know. Haldeman thought that people actually want to keep their body, but Benford reminded him, "Remember, the body dies. People want to get out of a burning house," and quoted W. B. Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" about "monuments of unaging

intellect." This was so appropriate to this discussion (and the one on immortality) that I have included it at the end of this section.

Haldeman said humanity has undergone three basic revolutions: speech, printing, and electronic connectivity. Benford felt that direct mind-machine interface is next step. So far our technology has all been aimed on reaching out, at projection, at having the greatest bandwidth and distance. There really has been nothing on how to process all this information faster.

Benford said of movements in science fiction, each one has a writer and a prophet. For the Golden Age, the writer was Robert A. Heinlein, and the prophet was John W. Campbell, Jr. For New Wave, the writer was J. G. Ballard, and the prophet was Michael Moorcock. For cyberpunk, the writer was William Gibson, and the prophet was Bruce Sterling. For post-human science fiction, the writer is Greg Egan, and the prophet is probably Damien Broderick.

Haldeman felt that a change to human nature is coming. Someone said that the "punk" in cyberpunk is the human element. And Speller concluded by saying that we have always been post-human, but the nature of our post-humanity is changing.

"Sailing to Byzantium" (1927)
by William Butler Yeats

I

That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees
--Those dying generations -- at their song,
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unaging intellect.

II

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress,
Nor is there singing school but studying
Monuments of its own magnificence;
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
To the holy city of Byzantium.

III

O sages standing in God's holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
And be the singing-masters of my soul.
Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is; and gather me
Into the artifices of eternity.

IV

Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enameling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;

Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

The Tyranny of Distance: Writing SF and Selling It Overseas
Sunday, 2PM

Jack Dann, Stephen Dedman, Bill Fawcett, Lucy Sussex

"The problems faced by writers who are based a long way from their markets: what they are, which ones can be overcome and which ones have to be worked around."

(For non-Australians: the title comes from Geoffrey Blainey's book *The Tyranny of Distance: How Distance Shaped Australia's History*.)

Dann lives in Australia, but is a consulting editor for Tor. Dedman has been published mostly in the United States. Sussex is an Australian writer. Fawcett is a writer and book packager who lives in the United States (I believe).

The panel started by noting that even the United States market is not what it used to be. There were fourteen science fiction publishing houses in 1980, now there are six. The panel then spent a lot of time talking about the New York publishing world, which I did not take notes on.

Fawcett said that there are two markets: the major publishers and the magazines. All the United States publishers except TSR are in New York. There are basically five United States magazines: *Analog*, *Asimov's*, *Magazine of Fantasy Science & Fiction*, *SF Age*, and *Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine*.

Sussex described what she called "Cultural Cringe," where you are no good unless you have some overseas recognition. Of course, then you are not considered Australian (or Australasian) any more. Selling overseas effectively ends your Australian career. (This seems to be true--though Greg Egan won a Hugo for "Oceanic," it was not even nominated for the Ditmar. [Is there some New Zealand equivalent to the Ditmar?])

One problem with selling to another country is postage costs. It may sound like authors are quibbling over \$6, but if you need to submit a story many times, it can add up to a couple of hundred dollars. And Dedman added, "Don't bother with International Reply Coupons" (for the self-addressed stamped envelopes for replies). They are not really used in the United States, so get United States stamps somehow. (This makes us sound so provincial, but we are. How many people reading this in the United States know what IRCs are--or would even recognize the acronym?)

Even getting paid is a nuisance. Bank charges for small checks (for short fiction, for example) are often a large part of, and sometimes more than, the amount. So for small amounts, get paid in stamps and solve both problems.

You can sometimes do business over the Net (Dann says that cover art and such have been emailed to him), but not very much. Some publishers will accept email submissions, but only from known authors, and only for short fiction. (I think some publishers have accepted novels from people like Arthur C. Clarke on diskette.) You are more likely to be able to save on reply postage by getting email responses. Also, courier service is almost the same price as postage.

Dann said an author cannot make a living as an author in Australia unless he or she is doing young adult novels. But if you are just starting, you do not need to sell overseas.

Much advice generic to all new authors followed, which I did not keep track of (subscribe to *Locus*, know the markets, etc.). The only specific "overseas" issue they covered was paper size--A4 paper is

okay to send to the United States.

Fawcett said that Tor, Baen, and DAW are the only houses interested in new authors. (I thought I had seen new authors from other publishers, but I could be wrong.) As far as Britain, Dedman said there is *Interzone*, but forget Britain otherwise. He claimed British publishers are interested in only British authors, which seems to ignore the fact that Greg Egan's books all see first publication in Britain.

Writers and Awards: Tiptree, Hugo, ...

Sunday, 4PM

Alison Goodman, Justine Larbalestier, Robert Sawyer, Janeen Webb

"Authors who have received awards and members of award giving committees discuss the role of awards generally in relation to a writer's career. Which awards affect sales?"

Goodman has won the Aurealis Award. Larbalestier has been on the Tiptree Award jury. Sawyer has won twenty-one awards, and served on the Philip K. Dick Award jury. Webb has won the Aurealis and the Ditmar.

Sawyer said that he consciously went after awards in that he saw that *Analog* serializations helped win awards for Lois McMaster Bujold and others and decided that he should try for a serialization. The down-side of a serialization, of course, is that people who have the magazine may not buy the book. This is more important for hardcovers, so when he had a mass-market sale for *The Terminal Experiment*, he also sold it to *Analog* for US\$4000, and it won the Nebula and the Aurora, and got a Hugo nomination. (Of course, what Sawyer did not say was that it also had to be very good to do all that.) So exposure is important. His next novel, *Starplex*, followed much the same pattern. So he said, "Rule Number One--exposure." For the Philip K. Dick Award, just the fact that Sawyer mentioned the existence of Robert Charles Wilson's *Mysterium* to all the judges was enough to get it the attention it needed to get the award. Larbalestier said that the Tiptree judges are often criticized for not listing books that it turns out they never saw. "You can't give an award to a book you haven't seen."

(Another possible example of exposure is this year's novella category for the Hugo Awards. Greg Egan's "Oceanic" had the fewest nominations of anything on the ballot in that category, yet won, very probably by being called to the attention of people who had not read it yet.)

Webb said that there were definite differences between the need for (or definition of) exposure between juried awards and popular awards. For the juried awards, the publisher (or author) can send copies of the book to all the judges. For a popular award (like the Hugo Awards), bookstore exposure, reviews, and word-of-mouth are more important. She said that judges get a lot of "submissions." Larbalestier agreed, and added that not all of it qualifies. For the Tiptree, some publishers send them "everything with a woman on the front cover and everything written by a woman." So it is, I suppose, ironic that Theodore Roszak's *The Memoirs of Elizabeth Frankenstein* won one year, having neither of those qualities. (I know that when I was on the panel for the Readercon Small Press Awards, I got about 120 submissions, which had to be read in something like two or three months. I had a little trolley of books and magazines that I wheeled around the house with me.)

As for how awards are decided, the popular awards are voted on with some well-defined (if complex) system. The juried awards are done a variety of ways. Some use a point system. Some use compromise. Larbalestier said that often the result is that the "least offensive book wins." The Tiptree Award itself has a strong agenda for consensus. The Aurealis Award tried that but it did not work. Most seem to be very contentious, and there is no clear-cut answer on using a point system or not.

As for the value, the received wisdom was that "Hugo-Award Winner" on the cover of a book helps sales, and nothing else does. But Sawyer's advances doubled (in Japan they went up 500%) after he won the Nebula, and new foreign sales shot up as well. The Philip K. Dick Award does nothing financially. But all awards give encouragement to the writer and that is important too. Sawyer says

there are days when a writer thinks that he has never written anything worthwhile, and going into the living room and looking at a shelf of awards helps him get over that.

Webb said that in Australia the Aurealis Awards are important to the publishers. And making the short list for the Children's Book Council Award brings immediate reprints, because the schools all buy the short list. The award itself is nice, but the short list is what counts. The Victoria's Premier Award is valuable (and has a cash award also). All these also increase an author's advances. The Ditmars (voted on by the fans) help an author's status, but do not have any real effect on sales. The Tiptree also has no real effect on sales, but makes that sort of fiction more visible. Mary Doria Russell's *The Sparrow*, published as mainstream, was launched in the science fiction community by the Tiptree. And apparently, David Brin set out at one point specifically to write something that would win a Tiptree. It did not, and I am not sure what it was, but Larbalestier wishes others would try. (I have my doubts that this method would produce a worthy novel if the author would not have written it anyway.)

Sawyer put in one last plea, saying that this year the Worldcon had around 2000 members, yet the Hugo Awards were voted on by only about 200. So vote!

"Cell"
A One-Act Play by Stephen Dedman
Sunday, 5PM
Starring Stephen Dedman, Dave Lockett

"600 years after dying unrepentant, Dr. Faustus is still in Hell--trapped in a book-filled 3-metre cube with Mephistopheles, who is still struggling to understand his decision. It's one damned thing after another"

This was well-written and well-acted, two features not always found in live dramatic presentations at conventions. Unfortunately, recommending it here is probably futile, although Dedman says it has been performed at Swancons, so maybe it will be again.

Masquerade
Sunday, 8PM

The Masquerade was hosted brilliantly by David Heap and Nick Stathopoulos. Not for them the formal standing behind a podium the entire time reading names. They took time out to give lessons in musicology, demonstrate special effects from the film *The Matrix*, and generally entertain the audience as well as anyone since the stripper in Kansas City. (And if they had known about her, who knows what might have happened?)

The show began with filk songs presented by various singers:

- | Craig Hilton: "Walk on the Dark Side"
- | Lynn Gold: "I'm Dating a Guy Who Is Not on the Net" and "Holistic California Love"
- | Ian Nicholls (of Slippery Jim and the Ratettes): "The Barbarian Song" and "Starship Troopers"
- | Dave Lockett and Susan Margaret: "The Parasites' Anthem" and "We Fought the Dark" (from "Dark Winter")
- | Joe and Gay Haldeman: "Ballad of the Hubble Space Telescope" and "Ballad of Orbital Hubris"

Sample verse from "Walk on the Dark Side":

Annikin was hungry for power,
The teachings of the Jedi all gone sour.
Back in black, now with helmet, cloak,

And he'll kill his own family for a joke,
I said: Hey, Darth, take a walk on the Dark Side.
I said: Hey, Vader, take a walk on the Dark Side.

Chorus

And the Imperial troops go: Doo, do-doo, do-doo, doo do-doo ... etc.

"Ballad of the Hubble Space Telescope" was sung only far enough to get Joe Haldeman singing "You got a one-tonna mirror" to the tune of "Guantanamo." "Ballad of Orbital Hubris" is about the O'Neill plan for space colonies, and it contains the refrain, "It was sad, it was sad, it was sad when that colony came down ... hit Peoria. Mothers and wives, little children lost their lives. Oh, it was sad when that colony came down."

Then Heap and Stathopoulos did a whole re-enactment of the Martian warships sinking the "Thunderchild," complete with props and to the Jeff Wayne music.

Interspersed with the costumes were the previously mentioned routines. One was about the music and characters from *Lost in Space* ending in an unrepeatable pun involving Heap (as Will Robinson) putting on a Minbari headpiece. ("This is *the* most degrading moment of my life.")

In another Stathopoulos was explaining about James Horner, how original he was, his use of percussion, and how it was an homage to Prokofiev. Stathopoulos would hum a bit, and then whip out a frying pan and hit Heap on the head with it to match the percussion sounds. He went through about three soundtracks like this, complete with Heap doing pratfalls, and saying things like "I don't even remember rehearsing that."

The best special effect from *The Matrix* had Heap dodging bullets fired by Stathopoulos. The whole thing was done in slow motion and the path of bullets was represented by Stathopoulos holding one end of a rainbow-colored plastic Slinky next to a fake gun, while Ian Mond slowly carried the other end across the stage,

The Children's costumes were first, listed with the awards they won:

- | Adam McCaw: "Totoro" (Best Ecologically Sensitive Attitude)
- | Michael and Natalie Ortlieb: Shadow from "Babylon 5" (Best Contrast in Good and Evil)
- | Shayna Lynn Waitsman: "Silver Streak" (Best Choreography)

The adult entries (again, also listing awards) included:

- | Gail Adams: "Minbar Ranger" (Expert) (Best in Category)
- | Heather Magee: "Early Vampire Slayer" (Experienced)
- | Ivan Rippen: "Werecat" (Beginner)
- | Mel Kossick: "Medieval Star Trekky character" (Beginner)
- | Trish Ostwald, Lynette Mayer: "Queen of Naboo and Handmaiden" (Beginner) (Best in Category)
- | Chris Purdy: "Deanna's Choice" (Experienced) (Best Instant Gratification)
- | David Magee: "Samurai" (Beginner)
- | Karen Carlisle, David Carlisle, Megan Dansie: "Split Personalities" (Beginner) (Best Presentation)
- | Giulia De Cesare: "Queen Amidala" (Experienced)
- | Widya Santosa: "Yoda" (Experienced) (Best Comedy Performance)
- | Robert Jan: "A Hunting We Will Go" ("Alien Queen") (Experienced) (Best in Show) ("All of the judges were totally gobsmacked by the quality of this costume.")

Various one-liners throughout were provided by children from children's programming (I think). "You can't hide a piece of broccoli in a glass of milk." "Never try to baptize a cat." "Felt markers are not good for lipstick."

The "half-time show" was aboriginal music played on a dijeridu, not by an Aborigine, but then again, dijeridus are not local to the Melbourne area anyway. [Actually, he was an Aborigine-so much for the "look-and-guess" method.]

The awards were announced, including the following Hall Costume Awards:

- | Michele Jay Solomon: "Mary McPoppins"
- | Bruce and Deena MacDermott: "Amalgamated Way Technologies"
- | Jason Gaffney: "Foxy Lad"
- | Heather Buck: "I'm All Tied Up"
- | Cathy Larson: "Dark Fantasy"

The judges also gave special awards to David Heap and Nick Stathopoulos for "Best Sustained Performance by Two Certifiably Insane Morons", "Best Impact Above and Beyond the Call for Musicological Study" (or something to that effect), and "Best Special Effects" (the last including Ian Mond as well).

And all this was over by the civilized hour at 10:30PM. No three-and-a-half-hour first run-throughs. No hordes of folks leaving before the winners were announced. And everyone seemed to have a great time. I think one reason the filking was successful was that each person did only one or two songs. If one person had done all of them, there would not have been the freshness even of just hearing a different voice. And this way everyone could do their best performance.

(Of course, the fact that the theater was small enough that everyone could actually see what was happening on stage without large-screen television screens helped.)

Reading
Monday, 10AM
Robert J. Sawyer

I only caught the end of this on the way to another panel. Sawyer had read from his upcoming novel *Calculating God* and was in the question-and-answer period.

Someone asked him how he handled the "expository lump." He said that Kim Stanley Robinson's favorite review of *Red Mars* called it "a brutal overload of information" and Robinson's one regret was that he could not get the publisher to use that on the cover.

Sawyer said that it is interesting that no one says there is too much mystery in some mystery novel but they criticize science fiction for too much science. If in an Alastair Maclean novel, someone came in and said, "We just had this amazing fight with all these Nazis, but let's talk about something else," people would scream in outrage. And there is no non-perjorative term for "infodump."

On the other hand, he would rather be the favorite author of a narrow audience rather than have many people read him but think that he is just okay. The ideal fan mail, he said, is, "I really loved your book." He quoted Robert Silverberg as having said that the ideal review is "4000 words of tightly reasoned praise."

Regarding correspondence with fans, he has two lists: a list of lunatics, and a list of experts. He reminded the audience of (Stanley) Schmidt's Law: "The more adamantly a reader tells you that you are wrong, the less likely it is that they are right."

As for writing techniques, Sawyer writes non-linearly. His books have 80 to 120 scenes. He writes them all as they come to him, then fits together in a week at the end, at which time 15-20% of the scenes get dropped. Some readers think he rushes the ends, but he likes that pace. (If I had a criticism, it would be that he tends to put too many ideas in each novel, instead of focusing on a single one. Now if I could figure out how to say that in 4000 words of tightly reasoned praise....)

SF in the Media: Journeys into Space
Monday, 11AM

This turned out to be a fan-produced video documentary of science fiction television. Since I was not all that familiar with many of the shows they started with, and it seemed to be aimed at an audience that was, I left early.

What It Is We Do When We Read Science Fiction
Monday, 12N
Paul Kincaid

"A paper about the language of science fiction"

To Structuralists and Post-Structuralists words are sign posts which point toward something. Kincaid wanted to examine the language of science fiction and see what its neologisms point towards. Citing Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigations", Kincaid said, "When we say that every word signifies something, we have said nothing unless we say what distinction we wish to make." And he contended that the way science fiction uses neologisms is to make the strange familiar.

Kincaid began with some basic semiotics. "The cat sat on the mat," does not resemble what it represents, he said, and "What do we mean by 'mean'?" He recommended the book *How to Do Things with Words* by J. L. Austin (not the book of poetry of the same name by Joan Retallack), which talks about the parasitic use of words and how the normal use of words is often not merely suspended, but reversed.

The basic theory is that language models reality. But while "the cat sat on the mat" is fairly straightforward, a sentence such as, "There is a philosophical problem with a very active reading" is less obvious. The individual words are not the problem. "You don't need John Clute's vocabulary to read John Clute's reviews, just a fairly good dictionary." It is the way they are put together.

But if language models reality, what about fiction? "Fiction is not real." So the language in fiction (e.g., "Scrooge looked out his window onto the street") models nothing in reality--there is no Scrooge, this non-existent Scrooge had no window, and the non-existent Scrooge's non-existent window did not look out on any street. We can get around this if we decide that words stand for general types, not specific instances. There are differences in what we see, but there is a commonality, which he will call "meaning." Of course, words can change their meaning (e.g., gay). But the commonality of text does not depend on individual words; even without them, "the meaning of the text as a whole survives."

Consider the following line from Nancy Kress's *Beggars and Choosers*: "Drew turned his power chair to face Leshia's green eyes, and gene-mod perfect skin." Even if the reader does *not* know the specific meaning of "power-chair," he or she understands the gist--it is something like a powered wheelchair. But even if the reader *does* understand "gene-mod" as "genetically modified," Kincaid said, "it is an avatar of nothing that exists." Kincaid said, "There is no image brought to my mind by this sentence."

The critic Gary Westfahl claimed that the number of such words is some sort of measure of quantifying ideas. Kincaid did not agree with this, or even take it seriously. He felt this was too sterile a way of looking at the genre, and that Westfahl had misinterpreted the role of neologisms. They are not there to establish new ideas, Kincaid said, or to blind us with science. They are a guide to the

reader, a way to make the strange familiar. And in general, old words are better.

For example, Greg Egan in "Wang's Carpets" writes, "Paolo willed the polis library to brief him. It promptly rewired the declarative memory of his simulated traditional brain with all the information he was likely to need to satisfy his immediate curiosity." All are old words, even though "simulated traditional brain" is not a phrase we are likely to use in everyday discourse. These old words are combined in ways which change our reading of the words.

English is a living language. New words come into it, but always with a use. In other words, the referent comes first, then the word. Kincaid claimed that in fiction, the word may come first, although he did say that the writer comes up with a notion, then the word. However, the reader finds the word first.

There are several words which had been neologisms and are now familiar: robot, spaceship, cyberspace. "Robot" has even changed its meaning since its creation. (Kincaid suggested it might make an interesting paper for someone to track how this word got adopted into English. Someone in the audience suggested "ansible" as another one that might be easier, since it was more recent.)

These words succeed by using easily identifiable roots. ("Robot" comes from the Czech for "worker"; its first use was in the Czech play *R.U.R.*) In mainstream fiction, the reader can guess the meaning of a new word from context. In science fiction, the reader can guess the context from the meaning.

The term "gene-mod" is important as a signpost to say that "here genes are modified." It is not there as reflection of genuine speech patterns. For example, consider the sentence of dialogue "I received a vid call." People would actually say "I received a call." The sentence does not inhabit the future, but is there to tell us what the future is like.

So Kincaid concluded that it is not really the new words that matter, but the patterns that they signify, and that can be done without new words (e.g., Egan's work).

Another example is Robert A. Heinlein's "The door dilated." given as an example in Samuel R. Delany's essay "750 words." If we get no image of what the words represent, we cannot unravel what is meant. This is "the language of science fiction." "Her world exploded" may be metaphorical in mainstream, but literal in science fiction.

Our first exposure to science fiction can be disorienting--the words, the ideas, and the concepts are strange. So Kincaid said, "If a language is a set of conventions, then yes, science fiction is a language." But if not, then it is not. (Someone suggested that this may explain why people who do not start reading science fiction when they are young rarely pick it up when they are older--when you are young, you are more willing to accept you do not understand something and keep going anyway.)

"Gene-mod," for example, appears only in a few novels, and will mean different things in Kress's work than in that of other authors. And "vid call" means different things in different places. Given this, Kincaid said, "If science fiction were a language, you would have to learn it anew with each book you opened." So he felt that the SF-ness is in the vision a line conjures.

George Turner wrote in a story, "A private car placed [someone] well within the Minder income bracket." This carries with it a suggestion of intrusive paternalism as well as its literal meaning. Here, what makes it science fiction is the implication of the entire sentence, not the individual words.

The worlds of science fiction are different from the real world, and if language invokes this, the language has to be outside the real world. And "if we confuse science fiction with the language, we are confusing the conveyance with the conveyed."

Charles Taylor asked about meaning as a reference. What about "unicorn," "vampire," or "FTL

drive"--they have no referents in the real world. Kincaid said that they refer to concepts, which seemed a bit contradictory with his earlier statement that words precede their referents. Another phrase, "virtual reality" is an example of building the referent from the word.

Lori Meltzer felt that a critical point in a word's "life" comes when the same word was used in another context with the same meanings.

Bill Fawcett suggested that different readers may read things differently. (But this is not unique to science fiction.)

At this point, someone in the audience asked, "What is this all about?" And Kincaid summarized by saying that reading is an act of interpretation, and authors provide clues in the words they use. I am sure some wondered why he did not say this at the beginning.

In Defense of Hard SF
Monday, 2PM
Gregory Benford, Peter Nicholls

"Gregory Benford and Peter Nicholls discuss, debate even, hard SF."

(This room was full to overflowing, which is quite unusual for the last afternoon of a convention.)

Nicholls said this panel was "inspired" by a "snot-nosed review" of John Clute and Nicholls's *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* by James Gunn which claimed that in it hard science fiction was trashed by two Brits (who Nicholls pointed out were actually an Australian and a Canadian). He asked the audience what they thought of when hard science fiction was mentioned--who writes hard science fiction? One immediate response was, "Right-wing fascist bastards from California whose names all start with B."

A more common reaction is that hard science fiction is traditionally great concepts in "five-year-old first-grade prose," characterized by bathos. Nicholls said the epitome of hard science fiction was the book *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Clarke's attempt to make everything rational in a film that was entirely irrational.

Benford felt that the film tries to make the metaphysical physical, but "when you try to inspect the serial numbers on a metaphysical idea, you're in trouble."

Hard science fiction is also characterized by pointed stories (stories with a point or "punchline") such as Isaac Asimov's "Nightfall" or Arthur C. Clarke's "Nine Billion Names of God." But "first you have to have an idea. That's always hard."

Benford re-iterated his writer/prophet model: For the Golden Age, the writer was Robert A. Heinlein, and the prophet was John W. Campbell, Jr. For New Wave, the writer was J. G. Ballard, and the prophet was Michael Moorcock. For cyberpunk, the writer was William Gibson, and the prophet was Bruce Sterling. For post-humans, the writer is Greg Egan, and the prophet is probably Damien Broderick.

Nicholls felt that in hard SF, the science, not just modes and styles, is driving the literature. Talking about some of the reductionist ideas of Greg Egan, he said that these are ideas like "What happens when you can turn the charisma gain up"? He felt that this could lead to some sort of reductionist nightmare, and in fact thought that this sort of extrapolation might be why even other hard science fiction authors outsell Egan. (He mentioned that Peter Hamilton sells ten times as much.)

Nicholls said that hard science fiction inhabits a world in which there is a scientific mode of thought, a logical mode of thought. Because of this, hard science fiction is not limited to the "hard sciences"

and can include soft sciences such as biology (e.g., Greg Bear's *Blood Music*). He paused to ask David Hartwell (the editor of the recent hard science fiction anthology *The Ascent of Wonder*) if he agreed: "Is what I'm saying acceptable to you, David?" And the reply came back: "Yes." Nicholls recommended the anthology, though he said, "Not everything in this book do I endorse."

Benford said that the citadel of hardness--and ineptness of style--is *Analog*. Regarding the style, he thought a parody of a Henry James story for *Analog* would be interesting, and noted that his own *Against Infinity* was supposed to be Faulkneresque. Referring to *Analog's* reputation as printing clear, straightforward prose, he said it looks clear only if you are tone-deaf, but it looks clunky if you have an eye for sentences.

The panelists mentioned some hard science fiction writers who wrote without doing a lot of revising. For example, John Taine (Eric Temple Bell) wrote all his books during his Christmas breaks, for example. And Fred Hoyle also wrote straight out. This is in part because the scientific culture does not encourage people to write well.

Nicholls said that hard science fiction could be considered as a sub-genre where the contrast between figure and ground is different--the reader must always be aware of the setting. It must be implicit or explicit, and the author must call attention to it. He commented that some people are turned off by strange names, so hard science fiction has "a tough row to hoe." (This echoed some of what was expressed by people in the previous panel, "What It Is We Do When We Read Science Fiction.")

Nicholls said that "the sense of wonder does not have to be stimulated by fine writing" but there are good writers writing hard science fiction, listing Greg Egan, Greg Bear, and Gregory Benford (which I dubbed "an aggregate of Gregs").

Benford said that Heinlein juveniles were hard science fiction and had a message for their readers: the hardness of the universe, and that the universe requires work, but also that you can do better than "all the swine around you worried about the high school prom." The real problem with writing a lot of hard science fiction is, "How do you turn cosmology into a story about a human being?"

Assuming that most writers of hard science fiction will have to bend (or stretch) the science somewhere, Benford said, "The cheat matters less the further it's pushed back in the book." This is because the reader "can read further without throwing the book against the wall and ruining the spine so that the pages fall out."

Benford quoted Arthur C. Clarke: "There was a time when men thought the stars dictated the affairs of men. There will come a time when men dictate the affairs of stars." But, he warned, "The universe is worse than hostile--it is indifferent." Regarding our place in the universe, he said, "I'm not a fan of the strong anthropic principle; I'm okay with the weak one."

According to Benford, James Blish wrote hard science fiction about magic in "Black Easter" and similar books. As Benford said in *Foundation's Fear*, "Any technology that doesn't appear to be magical is insufficiently advanced."

Someone mentioned the idea that the scientific reality is a manufactured reality, and Benford replied, "Whenever I hear post-Modernism, I reach for my revolver." At the audience's reaction to this, he described himself as "right-wing in the trendy left-wing sense." Digressing somewhat, Benford said it was necessary to distinguish between conservatives and libertarians. (Libertarians are hard on indigents, for example.)

As for conservatives versus liberals, it is not surprising that most writers of hard science fiction are conservative. As a generalization, he said, conservatives assume people are not malleable, while liberals think that people are. Phrased slightly differently, the conservatives say, "The world is hard and relentless," while the liberals say, "The world is malleable." Clearly the former is more in keeping

with the assumptions of hard science fiction. Hartwell said that the reputation that hard science fiction got in the 1980s "authoritarian and militaristic."

Someone in the audience suggested that conservatism had cultural, economic, and nature-versus-nurture aspects that should not be confused with each other. One could be an economic conservative, but a cultural liberal, for example. The simple left-right dichotomy is trying to use a one-dimensional model of a complex world. At the very least, one should add a statism/anti-statism axis.

Benford felt this was all somewhat ironic. Robert A. Heinlein was considered very right-wing, yet in his youth he worked for Upton Sinclair's campaign. David Brin is a left-wing hard science fiction writer. His most recent political "credentials" would be his article decrying the apparent desire of George Lucas in the "Star Wars" films to want to go back to the rule of kings.

There is in hard science fiction the esthetic issue on how much one should depart from reality, but this was basically a restatement of some of the ideas from the "Science in SF" panel, summed up as "You gain excellence by the effect of the constraints."

Nicholls closed by saying that Benford was "one of the most hard-working Guests of Honour I've ever seen at a Worldcon."

Closing Ceremonies Monday, 4PM

The room was packed, with people standing all around the back and the balconies, and sitting in the aisles. If there had been rafters, people would have been hanging from them.

They re-ran the videos from the Opening Ceremonies and the Hugo Award Ceremonies. The Guests of Honour were introduced one last time. Gregory Benford said that this was his best Worldcon even including the 1968 one "when all the drugs were free." There was great interplay with the fans, and he enjoyed it immensely. One of the gifts the convention gave him was a boomerang "to make sure you come back to us."

(I agree with Peter Nicholls: Benford was the hardest-working Guest of Honour I can remember. Even when he was not doing five hours of panels a day, he was talking to people and actively seeking out people, not just responding when other people came up to him.)

J. Michael Straczynski said, "It was astonishingly smooth and well-run." There was a lot of laughter. "Hey, look, I write science fiction."

Paul Kincaid had a long list of people that he needed to thank, but summed it up with typical British reserve by saying, "I'm having a fucking wonderful time!"

Janice Gelb cried and thanked everyone.

Perry Middlemiss, undoubtedly with great relief, handed the gavel over to Tom Veal of Chicon 2000.

Summary

All American conventions are American in the same way but all foreign conventions are foreign in different ways.

For example, at least one Australian fan I talked to was amazed that most Dealers Rooms at Worldcons in North America were not mostly books. (One Canadian book dealer said that the only dealer at Canadian to make money was the dealer selling cards for "Magic: The Gathering.") On the

whole, this convention had attracted Australians who read science fiction, and fans whose primary interest was in media, gaming, etc., did not attend. This is not to say that there were not fans of the media there (after all, J. Michael Straczynski was a Special Guest, and not for his earlier horror novels). But the people attending the programming about media also shared an interest in the written form that is not always apparent at Worldcons in North America.

The programming was also "heavier" than at Worldcons in North America. There were symposia with prepared papers on rather deep issues, and which often involved rather more understanding of, say, scientific reductionism and the mind-body duality, than is usually required. In this, Aussiecon Three resembled British conventions, particularly Intersection in Glasgow.

Just for the record, I have attended Worldcons in 1971, 1974, 1976 through 1980, 1982 through 1984, and 1986 to the present. Put another way, I have missed only five in the twenty-nine since I started. And there is a certain sameness after a while in the programming and style of them, at least those in North America. There will be a panel on "From Book to Screen," another on alternate histories, another on humor in science fiction, and so on. They will have the same people and pretty much say the same things. At Aussiecon Three there were new panels: panels on the scientist in science fiction, or utopia and genocide, or specific aspects of various authors' careers, or an understandable look at the "semiotics" of science fiction.

And people attended differently. The Opening Ceremonies were held the first evening and were the "event" of the evening. There were very few parties--usually only one or two a night. Most people stayed for the entire Masquerade, even the judging. (They could, because it was a civilized length--quite a contrast to the year the first run-through was three and a half hours!) The Closing Ceremonies were so well attended that people were almost hanging from the rafters, or at least standing around the back, leaning over from the entrance balconies, and sitting in the aisles. (Part of this is a function of the location--few fans left in the middle of the day Monday. Local fans and those staying for sight-seeing did not need to, and flights to the United States, for example, are all morning flights and people took those Tuesday.)

People talked about the programming to each other. If you asked someone, "Did you go to such-and-such?" there was a good chance that the answer was yes and that you actually discuss it. People *cared* about the ideas brought up. People were involved.

Now if only we could figure out how to do that at a North American Worldcon. Maybe it does not scale up, but I hope someone gives it a try.

The site selection "tidying" amendment(s) passed, as well as the "No-Zone" amendment. (Some people objected to this title, since there would still be an excluded area each time, but I would argue that a zone is a permanently defined area, not a region that changes each year.) In any case, this means any site not within 500 miles of the Worldcon at which it is voted upon is eligible. While allowing a wider range of choices each year in North America, it does actually restrict overseas bids a bit more. For example, the Brighton/Hague pair could no longer occur. And it also precludes two cities just across an old zone boundary from each other (or even not "just"--Detroit is less than 500 miles from Philadelphia, so that pair is out as well). None of the currently announced bids are affected by this.

With 666 votes (to Roswell's 120), San José won the bid for the 2002 Worldcon. (Jokes on the number are already old, thank you.) It will officially be called ConJosé (with an acute accent on the "e" even if you are reading this in ASCII). (It will unofficially be called Cojones, as far as everyone can tell, no accent mark.) The Guests of Honor will be Vernor Vinge, David Cherry, Bjo & John Trimble, and Ferdinand Feghoot, and the Toastmaster will be Tad Williams. (Well, if ConFrancisco could have Mark Twain as a Dead Guest of Honor, ConJosé can have Ferdinand Feghoot as an Imaginary Guest of Honor. And if Vernor Vinge is a Guest of Honor, can we make Vernor's Ginger Ale the Official Con Drink?)

Next year in Chicago!

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