

ConFrancisco 1993

Con report by [Evelyn C. Leeper](#) and [Mark R. Leeper](#)

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[Mark has offered to write up some of the panels that he attended that I missed, so this is actually a joint report. The panels that he wrote up are labeled as such.]

ConFrancisco, the 1993 World Science Fiction Convention, and the 51st World Science Fiction Convention, was held September 2 through September 6 in San Francisco, California. The attendance was calculated as 7642. Being that San Francisco is harder to get to from Europe than East Coast conventions, there were fewer Europeans in evidence than usual.

We had arrived in California about a week before the convention, spending the time visiting with Mark's parents and traveling up to the northern California coast around Mendocino. We took the train

up from the peninsula Thursday morning and checked into the Nikko, our hotel, which was about a fifteen-minute walk from the Moscone Convention Center. Kate had already checked in and left us a note saying she was going over to register.

Facilities

The convention facilities were on the whole excellent. The rooms for the panels were right outside the large "concourse" where the dealers room, the art show, the exhibits, and so on were being held. This made dropping into the dealers room or checking the message board between panels a real possibility (although the message board seemed less utilized than at previous conventions--people I knew where there never checked in, and so on). However, the films were in the Nikko and the masquerade and Hugo ceremony were in the other section of the convention center, across the street. The latter was far too small--set up with sufficient backstage area, there was seating for only 2000 people. This meant enormous lines for the masquerade and many people turned away, with the result that a lot of people didn't even try to make it into the Hugo ceremony. I don't know what attendance they were expecting if they thought 2000 seats would be sufficient. Even worse, it was flat seating, as opposed to ramped theater style, so people in the back couldn't see anything. I know, because we ended up in the back for the masquerade. (There was VIP seating for Hugo nominees, but having stood in line with our friends, it seemed crash to dump them. We did move up during the intermission though.) For the Hugo ceremony, we had front-row seats, but I had to write 110,000 words last year to get them. :-) The parties and Con Suite (open only in the evenings) were in the Parc 55, which was right across the street from the Nikko--convenient for us, but not for people in the ANA, the main hotel right near the convention center.

The restaurant situation was infinitely better than last year: loads of restaurants within walking distance, including more Japanese restaurants than I've ever seen in one location. We went to a Cambodian restaurant the first night by car (the Angkor Wat), but after that made do with the sushi places and other restaurants between the Nikko and the convention center. The one problem was getting breakfast on Sunday and Monday--many of the breakfast places in the area cater to the business crowd and were closed.

Registration and All That Stuff

Registration was incredibly slow. We arrived at 11:15 AM Thursday and it took an hour. Kate arrived about 10 AM and it took her an hour and a half. One problem was that the materials didn't arrive until late Wednesday night, making a practice run-through with staff impossible. They could have used more stations, and I would strongly suggest that future conventions have the materials on hand by Tuesday morning, with early registration on Wednesday afternoon and evening to ease the crush. Also, the signs indicating the alphabet range from each station should be between six and ten feet off the floor, not resting on the floor, where they can't be seen through the crowds.

Another problem was that after registering, we had to get in another line to pick up the souvenir books and other free books. This was equally long, and someone came by saying people we should leave the line and come back later--there was plenty of stuff and more was being brought in constantly. Silly us, we believed him. The result was that by the time we went back to pick up our stuff (later in the day), they were already out of the free copies of Connie Willis's *Doomsday Book*. Second strong suggestion: before you say there will be plenty of X later, make sure that's true. (Third, mild suggestion: make badges available with a choice of pins or clips--it's very hard to clip a badge onto a T-shirt.)

There was also a third line, albeit a short one, for picking up program participant material. At that point I also got what was labeled my "Hugo nominee pin," which turned out to be a square of silver with black paint on it forming a rocket silhouette. The paint flaked off when I peeled the backing out to attach it to my badge. It turned out that these were merely temporary: the real rocket pins were very similar to previous years' (though lacking the year engraved on them), and had been delayed when the

luggage they were in was misdirected on the way from Russia!

For the first time at any Worldcon I have been to (and that's a lot), the newsletters were almost always on time, and never more than an hour late. The main drop-off point always had a complete supply of all newsletters.

As always, there were lots of flyers on the freebie tables, and free issues of *Analog* and *Asimov's* were being handed out. The usual movie buttons were also there. There must have been a sufficient supply; there were still some on Monday.

Program Books

The Pocket Program was universally acclaimed as once of the best ever. It was a 4-inch by 6-inch spiral-bound booklet containing the complete schedule (with descriptions--something which had been missing for the last three years), daily grids, convention center and hotel maps, restaurant listings, and just about everything else. (It did take a somewhat larger pocket than some other "pocket programs," though.) The one thing missing (and handed out separately) was the index by participant. As before, I had pulled a copy off the Net before the convention (and in fact had printed up a customized program for me of what I wanted to see, and gave a copy to Mark so he could find me), but I still found the Pocket Program useful. The Net copy wasn't posted until only thirty-six hours before Mark and I were leaving, which meant we had to scramble to print up customized versions. Suggestion to future conventions: post the schedule at least two weeks before the convention, because many people will go early to spend some vacation time in the area. The schedule is firmed up by then, because program participants have to know what their schedules are.

The Souvenir Book went back to its traditional format of essays and information, with no fiction such as was included last year.

Green Room

The Green Room seemed well laid out, with sufficient coffee and sodas. (I didn't spend much time there.) There were schedules available and it was right across from Program Operations, where one picked up the name cards for the panels. My major complaint again would be with the participants, who showed a distressing tendency *not* to show up before the panels in the Green Room as requested, making any pre-planning of introductions, topics, etc., impossible.

Dealers Room

As usual, the Dealers Room (a.k.a., the Hucksters Room) was very large, and seemed to have more books than last year (though it's hard to tell). However, I had made myself a promise not to buy a ton of books which I would have to carry back and having bought a few at used book stores before the convention, only bought two or three books I had been seeking for a while.

One interesting side-note: NESFA was selling its Cordwainer Smith collection, *The Rediscovery of Man* (edited by James Mann). The rights to one of the stories in it had originally been sold to Harlan Ellison for the (infamous) *Last Dangerous Visions* anthology. When Ellison heard they were selling it, he claimed he owned the rights to that story and apparently threatened to go over to the table and punch the first NESFA person he saw there for stealing a story they had no right to. What I heard later from NESFA was that Ellison thought he had bought the rights in perpetuity, but had actually bought them for a ten-year period, with an option to renew for five more (which he didn't pick up), and that this was twenty years ago. The net result of all this, however, was that everyone who was at Ellison's panel rushed over to the dealers room and bought a copy, and NESFA ended up selling out their entire at-the-con stock and taking orders to ship a whole lot more.

Art Show

I didn't get to see very much of the art show. Had I realized that the staff was not requiring that people check their bags, I might have tried to fit in some short trips between panels, but I was so used to having a visit to the art show take a minimum of ten minutes just for checking and un-checking bags that I never even tried. I did see a bit of it, especially the Hugo nominees exhibit. A friend commended them on their computerized purchase procedure, but wished that there was a way to pick up purchased artwork before 10 AM Monday, since her flight was not much after that. (There was someone there a little bit earlier, but there was no scheduled time to pick up artwork earlier.) Also, art show close-out was only an hour before the Hugo ceremony, and given the lines (see below), that meant people bidding on artwork had to sacrifice any chance of getting a decent seat at the ceremony.

Programming

There were 492 program items listed (not counting readings and autograph sessions). MagiCon had 420 program items, Chicon V had 520 program items, ConFiction 337, and Noreascon 3 833 (all not counting films or autograph sessions). I have no idea how many videos and films there were: due to family problems, the head of media programming had to withdraw shortly before the convention and the schedule was totally changed as the convention had to start from scratch at that point. (John L. Flynn came through with what must have been only hours notice with a series of lectures to go with the "Dracula" film festival that was shown one day.) There were also 33 autograph sessions and 29 readings. Once again, there were a *lot* of panels at this convention of interest to me, and I ended up with no time for lunch (and occasionally no time for dinner!).

Given that it's impossible to see everything at a Worldcon, I will cover just the programming I attended. However, Mark has graciously agreed to write up some of the panels he attended, and these are included as well (and labeled as his).

Panel: Mainstream/Slipstream

Thursday, 3:00 PM

Jonathan Lethem, Mark V. Ziesing

"'Mainstream' fiction hovering on our borders": Ziesing began by saying that he thought the New Wave was slipstream; Lethem gave only the example of Steve Ericson (*Arc d'X* and others). Other examples were Paul Auster (who wrote *The Music of Chance*, the film of which coincidentally we saw Monday after the convention ended), Anthony Burgess (*A Clockwork Orange*--though this is more into the science fiction area--and others), Jonathan Carroll (*Outside the Dog Museum* and others), Jim Dodge (whom I couldn't find in *Books in Print*), Thomas Palmer (who someone claimed wrote *Dream Science*, but I could find neither the author nor the title in *Books in Print*), Thomas Pynchon (*Gravity's Rainbow* and others), Lewis Shiner (*Glimpses* and others), and Jonathan Lethem's own upcoming *Gun, with Occasional Music*. Judith Merril claimed recently that slipstream fiction wasn't really a new phenomenon, but that the sales potential for slipstream books was low and so they never really made a splash.

In an attempt to define slipstream, one panelist said that it is marked by the reader's difficulty in distinguishing fantasy from dreams. (Having seen *The Music of Chance*, I understand what he meant.)

Lethem noted that in literature, fantasy had always been the dominant mode, and that it was only recently that "realistic fiction" became the mainstream. Borges and Kafka are examples of fantastic authors who are accepted as mainstream (i.e., "legitimate") authors, but their work was described as mainly pre-genre (whatever that means).

Another related category is non-science-fiction written by science fiction authors for science fiction readers. Lucius Shepard's Central American stories and Bradley Denton's *Blackburn* would probably fall into this category.

Slipstream was also characterized by Ziesing as being used by "aging hippies and beat-up love puppies" as a "literary rather than chemical way to alter their consciousness." It tends to produce psychological discomfort.

The panelists cautioned that it was a mistake to think there is a monolithic mainstream, about which the various genres cluster; even the "mainstream" is fragmented. Unfortunately, at this point the panel degenerated into the usual discussion of publishing and marketing.

Panel: **State of the Short Story**

Thursday, 4:00 PM

Maya Kathryn Bohnhoff, James Brunet, Scott Edelman, Rick Wilber

"How does this form fare in science fiction and fantasy magazines and books, and in the rest of the literary world": Edelman began by saying that in his opinion, short fiction is where everything important happens first--it is the cutting edge. Other panelists felt that this might be connected to the fact that short fiction gives the author more immediate feedback or gratification. While a novel could take a year or more to write, a short story can be written in a much shorter length of time. So writers are willing to make the investment in experimenting in the shorter forms. In addition, there are more markets for short fiction now than there were ten years ago. This does not mean it's easy to break into the market, but it is easier than before.

Because it is true that short fiction is not as profitable as novels, many people seem to feel that authors "graduate" from short fiction to novels. (See the introduction to Karen Joy Fowler's collection *Artificial Things* for a description of this phenomenon: she says she prefers short fiction and even got a reputation as "the person who wouldn't write a novel for Bantam.") Wilber also thought that short stories were not only "a good place to get started, but ... also a good place to be." And Harlan Ellison, one of the most respected writers in the field, has never written a science fiction novel (though he has written a couple of non-science-fiction novels).

One problem with short fiction is that magazines have a definite shelf life. Stories may be popular, but after their month or two is up, they become impossible to find. While anthologies have a longer lifetime, they are less predictable or reliable. As Brunet put it, "The anthology is the hot date; the magazine is a long-term relationship." It is true that inclusion in one of the "Year's Best" anthologies will probably assure a story of being available for at least a couple of years, but original anthologies are trickier.

The panelists pointed out, however, that science fiction magazines at least have a readership. Literary magazines stay alive because of the pressures of academia: they provide a place to "publish" instead of "perish" for professors, and they are pretty much required reading for other professors. Science fiction magazines, on the other hand, stay alive because people *want* to read them. The opinion was expressed that this might even explain some of the hostility toward science fiction from academia: jealousy.

One recent phenomenon is the stand-alone novella from publishers such as Bantam. Priced below the cost of a novel and offering readers a chance to read a "book" without committing to a 600-page odyssey, they are also giving authors more market for novellas, traditionally a hard form to place.

Above all, though, Wilbur says, if you want to break into the short fiction market, "embrace rejection." In agreement, Brunet said that the best experience he got for selling short fiction was his experience dating in his early twenties.

Panel: **Introduction to Computer Networking**

Thursday, 5:00 PM

Seth Breidbart, Daniel Dern, Tom Galloway, Mark L. Olson, Martha Soukup (m)

"Discussion of the world of electronic mail and beyond--CompuServe, GENie, Prodigy, BIX, the WELL and the Internet": The first item of business was asking what networks audience members were on. All the networks seemed to be represented except Prodigy, which got a bunch of loud boo's instead of hands raised. The room was packed, mostly with people already networked, though there were a few people who had not gotten connected and were hoping to get some advice.

After a brief history of computer networking (with the note that *SF-Lovers Digest* was originally a secret because of the restricted nature of the early Internet, and went public only in January of 1984), discussion turned to the recent announcement that some cable companies were going to start providing Internet connections via cable (at a fairly high price compared to public access services, though). The popularity of the Internet in general was thought by some to be leading to "death by success," to which a large number of people responded in chorus, "Imminent death of the Net predicted..." (With every change or growth spurt, people have been posting to the Net predicting that this would be the cause of the final collapse. Yet like that pink rabbit, it keeps on going. Or if you're older, like Timex, it keeps on ticking.)

Differences between commercial networks and the Internet were touched on. The commercial culture is a very top-down culture with rules and organization being dictated from above. The Internet is a "cooperative anarchy"; everything is bottom-up. If you want a connection, you just find someone already on it willing to provide one, as opposed to having to contact a central organization.

The major problem--how to solve infoglut--was not addressed.

There are so many panels on computers and networking, one wonders when conventions will start providing terminal rooms.

Panel: Today Is Tomorrow's Yesterday

Thursday, 6:00 PM

Barbara Delaplace, John Hertz, Harry Turtledove (m)

"Likely errors in future historical fiction about our era": The panel started by defining "today" as the period from 1945 to the present. The most obvious errors, they said, would be simple anachronisms: pot-smoking free love in 1951 or a Beatles concert in 1947. Authors writing about a historical period need to throw in details like this to create verisimilitude--as Hertz said, "Verisimilitude is very tricky stuff"--but it is very easy to get it wrong. Suggesting a few details allows the reader to fill in the rest, and authors aren't always careful about the details, especially if they think their audience is unfamiliar with the period.

Of course, unfamiliarity may not be the case. After all, there is a flood of information available for the present. Byzantine history (Turtledove's specialty) requires inference from the documents surviving, but we are absolutely swimming in documents. Even with some of them unreadable due to obsolete media (such as music stored on eight-track tapes), there will be so much that it will be impossible to avoid verifiable errors with only a finite amount of research.

Another error is that people forget how quickly attitudes can change. This is what Mark calls the "Happy Days" Syndrome: the show took place in the 1950s, but everyone had the attitudes of the 1980s. This is also one reason that feminist Regency novels don't work very well. (Hertz suggested that you think of a viewpoint as a geographic thing.) It's easy to eat the food of people of another period and wear their clothing, but it's hard to think their thoughts and feel their feelings. Turtledove

warns, however, that you often have to tone down attitudes or the audience will be turned off by them. For example, the attitude that blacks were sub-human was very common in earlier centuries, yet having a "hero" who espoused this attitude, however accurately, would not be acceptable to modern audiences. Rest assured, though, that we will suffer the same fate or, as Turtledove put it, "Whatever you think about X will be considered absurd five hundred years from now," where X could be religion, abortion, meat-eating, or any other subject. Yes, we think we have proof that our beliefs are right, but then previous generations also thought they had proof. Panelists also noted that some facts need to be left out--they are too convenient and people will think you have made them up.

One thing that Hertz felt characterizes our period as different that might very well seem absurd in the future is that we are as compulsively casual as previous cultures were formal. Whether the pendulum will swing completely back is not clear, but he feels that some return to formality will occur, and we will look absurd to future readers.

On the other hand, novels written about their own period can often skip important details that would be obvious to those of the author's time, but completely lost on an audience a hundred years later. As one panelist said, he could tell when reading a Jane Austen that *something* important was going on, but he didn't have the knowledge of the period to figure out what. Writers writing about earlier historical periods have to give the reader enough to understand what is happening. Georgette Heyer is supposedly good at this.

Turtledove observed that writing about the past was dangerous because "you have more excuse for making mistakes about the future than about the past." Even so, some literary license is permitted since "historians deal with facts, novelists deal with truth."

More basic questions raised were: Will anyone care about us? Why do we do the strange things we do? What are the future stereotypes of our age? These were not answered, but the last one brought about the observation that an era of history is only noticed after it is over. (As Kim Stanley Robinson noted in his lecture on Postmodernism people didn't sit around in Europe and say, "Well, last year was the Dark Ages, but now is the Renaissance.") Someone compared this to the cloud in Poul Anderson's *Brain Wave*: you only realize it exists once you're out of it.

Parties

Thursday, 10:00 PM

We returned from dinner at the Angkor Wat too late for the opening ceremonies, so I settled for dropping in to a couple of parties, the MagiCon Thank You Party (where I won a water bottle in their free give-a-ways), and the Boston in '01 Party. At the latter I discussed the various bids for 1998, none of which fills me with confidence. I have heard a rumor that Atlanta might throw its hat into the ring for 1998 (since their 1995 convention is the NASFiC rather than the Worldcon, they can do this). By the way, voters should realize that if Boston wins in 1998, it is ineligible in 2001.

I didn't really run into people I was looking for at the parties, but I did see several people other times of day: Lan at registration, Mike Ward by the elevators, and so on. This was good, because I was going to be immersing myself in panels for the next few days and wouldn't have much chance to meet people unless they were going to the same panels.

Panel: Should SF/F Strive for Literary Respectability

Friday, 10:00 AM

Gregory Benford, David G. Hartwell, Ron Montana (m)

"A debate over whether or not mainstream literary respectability is a desirable goal": Benford began

by saying that he was working under a disadvantage, because English was not his first language--he's from southern Alabama. But he worked on getting rid of his accent because he realized at age 14 that people deduct twenty points from someone's IQ if they hear a southern accent.

The panelists felt that one approach to literary respectability was that of Deena Brown: "Let's get science fiction back in the gutter where it belongs." That seems to be the literary establishment's view: a proposal submitted to the National Science Foundation and the National Endowment of the Arts to use science fiction to teach science was rated high by the NSF and low by the NEA. But all is not lost, Hartwell reassured us: "Science fiction has escalated from the respectability of pornography to the respectability of the average Western." However, Hartwell, who teaches a science fiction course at Harvard during the summer, was turned down when he offered to teach one during the regular school year. "Hell would freeze over before Harvard would allow science fiction to be taught during the regular school year," he said he was told (though perhaps not exactly in those words).

Benford doesn't think respectability is worth very much, because it is too easy to compromise one's art to gain respectability, and quoted Dylan as having said, "To live outside the law, you must be honest." (That's Bob Dylan, not Dylan Thomas.) For one thing, he thought much of the cynicism in today's mainstream was un-earned. People point to today's crises, such as AIDS, as the reason for this cynicism, but he reminded the audience that the 1919 influenza epidemic was much worse.

I asked if fantasy was more acceptable than science fiction to the literary establishment and Hartwell said that was certainly true. (This meshes with Lethem's comment yesterday on the "Slipstream" panel--literature was mostly fantastic for a long time.)

Speaking of the limitations of writing science fiction, especially strictly accurate science fiction, Benford felt that a genre flourishes because of its restraints. He did allow authors to make *one* change to current science if they had to, but he himself tries to avoid that. He is, for example, one of the few science fiction authors who won't use faster-than-light travel.

From the audience, Maia Cowan pointed out that it was somewhat futile to try to write books that would have respectability: books written to be literary classics aren't, and books written for a quick buck have outlasted them. Arthur Conan Doyle is the perfect example of this: he assumed his fame would rest on his historical novels (quick, can you name even one of them?), while his Sherlock Holmes (and Edward Challenger) stories were written to pay the bills. And tastes in literature change. James Fenimore Cooper's works used to be considered classics; today no one reads them (except possibly to make a movie of them--and then they make a lot of changes).

Talking about best-sellers, Hartwell said that he loved Michael Crichton's *Congo*, but Benford complained that Crichton, Robin Cook, and Stephen King use "the sizzle of science" to preach that science is bad for you.

Someone asked whether anyone would ever win a Nobel Prize for science fiction, and were told that it had already happened (Harry Martinson for *Aniara*). Other possibilities for the future are Stanislaw Lem and whichever Strugatsky brother is still alive (Arkady or Boris). In other countries, science fiction is respected more in general.

Benford said he wasn't sure what "literature" was: "If literature merely means pretty sentences, count me out." (Someone noted that Ernest Hemingway is considered literature, and as the "Grandfather of Minimalism" was *not* a purveyor of pretty sentences.) For the scientifically-inclined in the audience, Benford said that one problem is that "the literary world is dominated by the inertial term."

In a side note, Benford said that one reason that John W. Campbell liked dictatorships so much in stories submitted to him was that that was how he ran his magazine. (By the way, Benford has a new book out, *Chiller*, written under the pseudonym of Sterling Blake. I believe it's being marketed as a techno-thriller.)

Lecture: Postmodernism and SF

Friday, 11:00 AM

Kim Stanley Robinson

Well, coming out of this I felt that I finally understood what Postmodernism was.

Robinson began by saying that all the adjectives being used to talk about Postmodernism today used to be used to talk about science fiction, so it was natural that there should seem to be a connection. But Postmodernism is a historical period, not a style. Now is different than the Modernist period, and so needs a new name. (Robinson described this whole process as "periodization," and noted that people did not suddenly say, "It's not the Dark Ages anymore; it's the Renaissance." Only later did these labels get applied.) A period corresponds to a structure for feeling. But even within a period there are "residual" and "emergent" aspects. For one thing, he said, this allows people to dispose of anomalies easily.

Postmodernism, as a period, follows Modernism. Modernism, in turn, followed Romanticism, which was represented by Realism. Various aspects of Modernism included Impressionism, stream of consciousness, existentialism, and the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright. This is not to say everyone was Modern; rural areas were in most cases pre-Modern (still feudal in many ways). But in the arts the basic "structure of feeling" or zeitgeist was alienation. People found themselves between the modern city and the rural area, and not really *of* either. Modernism was also characterized by a functioning avant garde and a concern with history.

The change "point" between Modernism and Postmodernism was the period from 1939 to 1969. This was the end of the old world order, brought about partly by World War II, and partly by the end of colonialism, or as Jean Paul Sartre put it, "All the natives of the world proclaimed that they were people." Fragmentation is the basic "structure of feeling" or zeitgeist in Postmodernism. There is a loss of purpose or of self. Robinson later said that to deal with this loss, we have a nostalgia for tribal cultures because tribalism is an attempt to create social groups we can recognize and deal with.

We are not fully modernized, Robinson said. (I might dispute this, having seen rural farms in China. Actually, Robinson did later qualify this by saying there were still unmodernized areas. But communication has changed a lot of that. When we were trekking in northern Thailand a couple of years ago, our guide turned out to be a Bon Jovi fan and to play in a heavy metal group.) Our architecture is learning from Las Vegas. Robinson pointed to the Marriott near the convention center that looks like a 1950s jukebox. (This was also mentioned in the "Future and Movies" panel.) Architecture is now historical jumbles or melanges. I find this amusing as there is a painting which shows a city with just such a jumble of styles, and it is titled "The Architect's Nightmare." Architecture now shows a sense of humor: in Atlanta there is a ten-story Gothic castle as the base of a seventy-story skyscraper, which is in turn topped with a cupola.

Pop art (such as Andy Warhol's work) is another aspect of Postmodernism. In fact, there is no big split between high art and popular art. Movies have glossy production values, even when portraying Depression dives in *The Sting* (which Robinson said looked like Hollywood fern bars) or the life of migrant farm workers in *Of Mice and Men*. New art forms arise. Fiona Jones in Boston hired people to go around and make other people happy as an art form. (It ended when the bank clerks she hired started giving money out to customers to make them happy!)

This lack of division between high art and popular art means that science fiction is the equal of any other art; there is no hierarchy any more. But this lack of division also means that to a Postmodernist, *Readers Digest* joke columns are equal to James Joyce. And much of the academic study of Postmodernism is horrendous writing and what's more, it considers itself art just as much as what it is discussing. (Robinson said that just about the only person worth reading on this topic was Frederick

Jameson [*Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*], though he was tough going.) What's more, the criticism tends to be political, even if Postmodernism itself isn't. There is also no avant garde, because it's impossible to shock the bourgeoisie. Mapplethorne is not avant garde so much as nostalgia for the avant garde.

Now, consider science fiction in the 1970s. It had shallow characters, a distortion of time and space, and so on. In fact, it looked like an emergent Postmodern art form, especially since art forms can go through periods vary quickly to catch up with the prevailing feeling. Elvis was Romanticist/Realist, the Beatles were Modernist, and Madonna is Postmodernist. In science fiction, John W. Campbell pushed realism, the New Wave pushed Modernism (with John Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar* modeled after John Dos Passos and Brian Aldiss's *Barefoot in the Head* modeled after James Joyce), and now we have Postmodernism. From the outside science fiction looked like an emergent form; from inside, it appeared to be an accelerated form. In science fiction art we have gone from the 1950s and Richard Powers's Modernist art to Realist art. Or is it just Postmodern glossy? Sometimes it's hard to tell.

Science fiction is an intermediate form between high and low art. (The nostalgia for the science fiction ghetto is really residual.) One reason that Postmodernism is often confused with science fiction is that "Postmodernism" literally means "after the now." "After the now" *is* science fiction, but in this case (as in many others) a literal translation of the component parts of a word gives an incorrect meaning.

But science fiction is really anti-Postmodernism. Postmodernism says that we are beyond historical styles because history has stopped--in other words, it takes an ahistorical view of the world. It is First-World-oriented (as was noted earlier). But science fiction has a sense of history proceeding into the future, and is *not* apolitical.

Science fiction is interested in utopianism. As Robinson said, "The future is going to be different depending on what we do," a theme I later stressed in the panel "Turning the Wheels of If." (And a theme of Robinson's work in general as well.) "The world is a braided science fiction novel," he added, "that we're all co-authoring right now."

The reading protocols of science fiction have to be explained to Postmodernists. It may appear to be part of the "movement," but appearances are deceiving.

Although cyberpunk claims to be an emergent form, Robinson said, we cannot predict emergent forms; they can only be recognized in hindsight, the same as historical periods.

Panel: Ahoy, Have You Seen the Great White Archetype?

Friday, 12 noon

Mary J. Caraker, Howard Frank, Katharine Kerr (m), Mike Resnick, Carol Severance

"What are they? Uses and abuses? Are there 'styles' in archetypes over the years?": The panel described archetypes as "ripping off mythological themes," as well as Christ figures and primitive legends. Most science fiction and fantasy is dominated by white European cultures and archetypes, though Severance uses Pacific Islanders and their archetypes. (Severance did note that she realizes that "Pacific Islanders" is a very broad term, encompassing many different cultures.) Severance felt that using different cultures made the fiction more interesting, because "every culture carries the rhythm of the physical setting that it's in." She mentioned in passing the large number of words for snow in Inuit languages, but also said that every Pacific Island language had a word meaning "death by falling coconut." Caraker is using the Kalevala (Finnish)--European, but not really over-used.

The panelists tried to distinguish between stereotype and archetype by saying the an archetype is a function within a pattern of story (e.g., quest stories have a hero). As Maia Cowan noted, archetypes

don't have to be people; they can be the quest itself, the journey, the generational ship, the wild place, or the clean village. (Someone noted that Earth *is* a generational ship, and someone else observed only poor villages were clean, because only rich villages would have garbage.) Olaf Stapledon was an author with a lot of archetypes and no characters whatsoever.

One danger in talking about archetypes is that people will find things in writing that was never (consciously) intended by the author.

H. Rider Haggard was an author cited whose work was almost entirely archetypal. But Frank noted that Haggard's best-known work was not his best, and that Haggard had the utmost respect for black culture in Africa, contrary to many people's impressions. Haggard also has a Victorian view of women but not, Frank claimed, a negative one. (Frank recommended *Nada the Lily* and *Eric Brighteyes* as Haggard's best. *She* was written in six weeks on a bet.)

Doyle used archetypes: the wise old storyteller in Watson (and others). In fact, the wise old storyteller is a very popular archetype among authors, undoubtedly because they *are* storytellers. Wells has his wise old professor (Cavor). Romulus and Remus are the feral children, which we see later in Rudyard Kipling's Mowgli and Edgar Rice Burroughs's Tarzan. But now these characters are usually given some flaw, usually for comic effect. Even so, science fiction still has noble characters, according to Frank, while most literature doesn't. Kerr felt that women authors often play against archetype as well as against stereotype in their female characters.

We now have the wise and compassionate alien and the creation that destroys its creator. They may seem new, but they really go back to the angel and the golem. There's also the master navigator, which shows up with Maoris as space-farers. And Heinlein's "competent man" is another archetype.

Someone asked if archetypes are what prevents science fiction from becoming a literary artform, or at least accepted as literature. This seems unlikely; there is much archetypal literature that is accepted as literature.

Anti-heroes are also found in science fiction: Alfred Bester's *Demolished Man* and *The Stars My Destination*, Clifford Simak's *City*, and David Lindsay's *Voyage to Arcturus*.

The prophet as archetype is now often replaced by the author himself or herself, as when someone writes an "if this goes on?" tale. This observation led someone to wonder if a Calvinist (or other believer in predestination) could accept a cautionary tale. On the other hand, what are all the warnings of damnation in the Bible if not cautionary tales?

Apropos of not much else, someone noted that in 1966 a survey of science fiction authors was taken and only Robert Heinlein and Robert Silverberg were making more than \$10,000 a year from their science fiction writing. (Isaac Asimov was making more, but mostly from his science writing.) Things have improved; a recent survey shows several authors (unnamed) making more than \$50,000 a year from their science fiction writing.

Panel: Using Literary Techniques in SF/F

Friday, 1:00 PM

Nicholas A. DiChario, Jean Mark Gawron, Eileen Gunn (m), Michael Kandel

"Is there room for stream of consciousness, self-referentiality, fractured time schemes and so on in SF?": The short answer seems to be yes, but focus on the task and choose the technique to fit rather than vice versa (according to Kandel, anyway). But it is the story-telling that is important, not the artsy-fartsy stuff.

The panelists agreed that writers pick up techniques by reading other writers and that therefore it is probably inevitable that these techniques will appear in science fiction. And some writers are more naturally stylists than others. The example given was that Mike Resnick is a storyteller and Lucius Shepard is a stylist.

How well do techniques translate from one language to another? This was a question perhaps better suited for the "Language" panel later, but Kandel said that there were some techniques that translated easily and others that were very difficult. (See the "Language" panel later for more on this.)

Regarding stylistic tricks, Kandel said that often one should "take out the goop" to improve things. This is true in the mainstream as well as in science fiction, since the dichotomy between the two implied in this panel's title doesn't really exist. Kandel also warned against "expository lumps," which seem inherent in science fiction, but can be handled well. As an example of an author who could handle these "lumps," Kandel mentioned James Schmitz. Gunn said that you should "cut out the boring, tedious stuff and leave only what interests you."

People asked about specific techniques. Regarding foreshadowing, one panelist said that it has to come from the text, not be applied to it like lipstick. However, a beginning writer may have to do this consciously for a while before it becomes an automatic process.

In answer to my question, DiChario said that he had chosen the diary format for "The Winterberry" as the best way to show the main character's mental state and also to skip large chunks of time. I didn't ask, but it seems obvious that this technique was inspired by Daniel Keyes's *Flowers for Algernon*.

Panel: **Gender Bending: What's Good**

Friday, 2:00 PM

Michael Blumlein, Suzy McKee Charnas, Jeanne Gomoll (m)

"Exploration of gender and roles isn't as popular in science fiction as it used to be. Are the issues too imponderable or have we explored this area thoroughly?": Blumlein started out by reminding us that the major debate about gender roles is still nature versus nurture. One of the best examples using the nurture theory in recent books is Sheri Tepper's *Sideshow*, in which the one of the two (hermaphroditic) halves of a set of joined twins is raised as a boy and one is raised as a girl.

Charnas noted that women can fill the spectrum of behavior, but that most fiction doesn't provide enough templates for this. However, if one writes about a society composed only of women, one finds that there is no problem in writing about a *complete* society. One doesn't find parts that women can't fit. (One assumes the same would be true from a men-only society, assuming some form of artificial reproduction. In fact, someone said that Lois McMaster Bujold did this with *Ethan of Athos*.)

One function of gender roles is to provide people with an anchor of stability. Most people are uncomfortable in free-floating masses of people (according to Charnas) and so groups form. (This harkens back to Robinson's comments about tribalism in his Postmodernism lecture.) Charnas gave Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite* as a good example of this group dynamic.

The discussion drifted into "gender dysphoria," or the psychological condition of feeling that your psychological sex doesn't match your physiological sex. (Forgive me if I am expressing this poorly; I do not have an M.D.) Someone said that, while transsexual surgery used to be considered a solution to this, such surgery is becoming less popular, though many people are taking the necessary hormones and living as the "other" sex. One suggested reason for this is that the easier of the two surgeries is male-to-female, but being a female in society today results in a loss of power, and people aren't ready to do that permanently. (Though I would think living as a female would have the same effect.) With this, as with a lot of the discussion, a lot of generalizations were thrown around.

Someone pointed out that even if someone did change their sex later in life (such as happened in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*), they would still have experienced the first part of their life as their original sex. In the case of Orlando, he had gone through adolescence as a boy, and so did not have the same life experiences as someone who went through adolescence as a girl, even after he changed into a woman. (The panelists felt that the movie left a lot out that the book had.)

Regarding gender roles, someone observed that society makes rules because the rules *aren't* fixed within us--if they were, we wouldn't have to make artificial ones. Someone else cited *The Rainbow Man* by M. J. Eng, in which women were *defined* as people who could give birth. So a "woman" who had some physiological problem which would prevent her from giving birth would not be considered a woman by that society.

One belief expressed was that there is a lot of emphasis placed on the societal pressures put on girls and woman, and less placed on the corresponding pressures on boys and men. At least one panelist said that we pretend that we can "skip the angry part" of problem-solving, but that is not true; we need to confront the pain.

There was some book-flogging at the beginning of this panel. Blumlein, who has an M. D., has written *The Movement of Mountains* and *The Brains of Rats*, and has a new book (called *X, Y*) coming out soon from Dell which will deal with a gay man who wakes up one day as a woman.

[Note: When discussing this subject, one trips all over the pronouns of the English language. If one is discussing someone who is in transition from one sex to the other (or was one and is now the other), pick either "he" or "she" and stick with it. "He/she" may work in written language as a replacement for "He or she," but in spoken language "he-she" is considered as offensive as any number of racial or ethnic epithets which I will not list here. This is undoubtedly because this grammatical construction has been picked up by the religious right and used by them in an extremely negative and condescending fashion. So now you know.]

Panel: **Computers and Class**

Friday, 4:00 PM

Lisa Mason, Tim May, Althea McMurrin, Jack Nimersheim, Richard Weiss (m)

"In an increasingly technology driven future, will the computer illiterates be the next underclass?": The discussion centered more on whether the current underclass would remain that way because they were denied access to computers than whether the "computer illiterate" of any class would become the new underclass. Interestingly, all the panelists were in the computer field, meaning that there was no "voice of the opposition," or in this case, no input from the people who do *not* use computers.

One feeling about computers and networking that most people seemed to agree with was that on a one-to-one basis it was a great equalizer, but overall it can be a stratifier. One question asked was, if the problem is exacerbated by the fact that upper-class people have more access to computers than lower-class people, does this mean that upper-class parents should stop getting their children the computers and other advantages they can afford?

Some people felt that the problem was not computer literacy or illiteracy, but literacy in general, and that was far more accessible to everyone.

On a more positive note, someone said that even the lower classes have Nintendo, which is a computer, so it is not the case that they are completely cut off from technology.

While the discussion was interesting, I don't think any of the panel (or the audience, most likely) had any definite knowledge on the topic. There was a lot of anecdotal evidence ("I've seen discrimination

in computers" "I haven't"), but no real basis for coming to conclusions.

Panel: **Nema Problema**

Friday, 5:00 PM

Lynn D. Maners (m), Larry Roeder

"The Worldcon is not in the former Yugoslavia this year, but many fans still live there. Who are they, and what's happened to them?": Well, the good news is that as far as Maners knows, none of the well-known Yugoslav fans have been killed in the war there. Other than that, information is sketchy. The two major science fiction magazines, *Alef* and *Sirius*, have folded. The clubs still meet--since none ever got any cultural funding anyway (through the Yugoslav equivalent of the National Endowment for the Arts), the break-up didn't disrupt that aspect of their organizations. (Of course, the runaway inflation in many of the republics must be damaging in general.)

Maners thought Slovenia was the only one of the republics to have turned into a democracy; the others are still dictatorships of one form or another. Apropos of this, I am reading Rebecca West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, her description of her travels through Yugoslavia in 1937 (complete with large chunks of history--those "expository lumps" that Kandel warns against in fiction writing, but which are marvelous in non-fiction). In her prologue, she says, "English persons, therefore, of humanitarian and reformist disposition constantly went out to the Balkan peninsula to see who was in fact ill-treating whom, and, being by the very nature of their perfectionist faith unable to accept the horrid hypothesis that everybody was ill-treating everybody else, came back with a pet Balkan people established in their hearts as suffering and innocent, eternally the massacree and never the massacer. The same sort of person ... often set up on the hearth [their pet people as resembling] Sir Joshua Reynolds's picture of the infant Samuel. But ... to hear Balkan-fanciers talk about each other's Infant Samuel was to think of some painter not at all like Sir Joshua Reynolds, say Hieronymous Bosch." But I digress.

There was some discussion of Yugoslav science fiction, where Maners said that it tended towards the philosophical rather than towards the more hardware-oriented versions. This he attributed to the fact that the country was not a major technological power, and he says this tendency is found in the science fiction of most smaller countries. In addition to being less technological, it is often less optimistic. It's easy for a citizen of a super-power to be optimistic about the future; it's more difficult for someone in a less powerful country. For one thing, they may feel that much of their future is in the hands of the super-power, who may decide to take action against them, or at any rate, ignore their welfare when making decisions.

Maners gave very complete instructions on how fans can donate books to the United States Information Agency libraries abroad (which is a sort of cultural exchange organization--*not* part of the Diplomatic Corps). Let me know if you want them.

Towards the end Larry Roeder came in and added a darker tone to the proceedings. He said that he expects there to be a lot more war in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, particularly since we have taken away the ability of the Bosnian Muslims to defend themselves. Ethnicity, he says, is *the* issue of the next decade, not just in the Balkans, but everywhere. Or, as D. Keith Mano said, "If Wilsonian self-determination were applied strictly to Yugoslavia there would be no kingdom larger than Greenwich Village. Yugoslavia isn't a nation: it's some form of ethnic and political super-collider." (*National Review*, June 30, 1989) The current plan to divide up Bosnia-Herzegovina certainly seems headed in that direction. However, Americans are not terribly unpopular (a delightful change). In fact, we are loved in Albania. Roeder claimed that this was because Nixon was related to King Zog, though he didn't say how. [Thanks to Mark for this last paragraph's worth; I had to leave early because I was on a 6 PM panel.]

(This panel was very sparsely attended--about thirteen people. Whether this means fans are apathetic, or just not interested in the specific case of *fandom* in the Balkans, I don't know.)

Panel: **Turning the Wheels of If**

Friday, 6:00 PM

Charles K. Bradley, John L. Flynn, Evelyn Leeper (m), Brad Linaweaver, Paul J. McAuley

[Much thanks to Mark for taking copious notes during this panel, as I can't be on a panel and take notes at the same time.]

"A discussion of likely change points for alternate realities, universes and histories": Although usually the panelists for a topic are authors who have written about that topic (and that was true here of Flynn, Linaweaver, and McAuley), Bradley was on the panel for a more unusual reason: he uses alternate history as a way to teach students regular history (though he did admit that sometimes he had to make sure they weren't getting confused about what was real and what was imaginary!).

I started by asking the panelists to pick one change point they would like to see dealt with, with the caveat that it *not* be European or North American, and especially not the American Civil War or World War II. McAuley thought that something involving Chinese expansionism might be good, although the feeling was that the Chinese philosophy did not lend itself to exploration; the Chinese had more of a feeling that other people should come to them. I suggested that if this came out of Confucianism, then a timeline without Confucius might have some interesting results. (Someone later suggested that the Chinese stopped exploring because they saw no monetary benefit from continuing.) Flynn said the one alternate history story he had written ("Paradox Lost") assumed that the Library at Alexandria hadn't been burnt and that the Egyptians conquered the world. I pointed out that what Mark was always reminding people was that the amount of time since the fall of the Egyptian empire was shorter than the time the empire existed (or as Mark says, "We are in the umbra of the Egyptian empire"). Linaweaver said he had just written "The Bison Riders" in which the Aztecs are not defeated by the Spanish, but instead become high-tech and expand into North America. (Strictly speaking, this is still a North American change point, but not a Eurocentric one.)

Bradley thought that something interesting could be done with General William Walker, who tried to seize Baja California and Sonora in 1853. He failed, but set himself up as president of Nicaragua in 1856, but was expelled in 1857. In 1860, he invaded Honduras, where his luck ran out: he was captured, court-martialed, and shot. Even today, he is hated by many factions in Central America. Another suggestion Bradley had was what if we had supported Ho Chi Minh, though again that is too close to an over-used change-point. My personal favorite (having recently read about prehistoric animal migrations) is what if the Bering land bridge had not existed? Not only would the Americas have been unpopulated when the Europeans (or Asians, or Africans) arrived, but the animal life of the Americas, and of Europe/Asia/Africa would have been vastly different. For example, as someone noted, horses and camels were New World animals which migrated *back* to the Old World and then died out in the New World. Imagine a Europe/Asia/Africa without horses or camels or donkeys. Other ideas for change-points batted around through the hour included what if Kaiser Wilhelm's father had lived longer, what if the Roanoke Colony had never existed, what if Carthage hadn't been defeated by Rome, what if Peter the Great hadn't turned Russia towards the West instead of remaining Eastern and what if Huey Long had been elected President (Virginia Dabney had this happen in a 1936 story which also assumed the South won the Civil War, and Barry Malzberg did this last year in "Kingfish"). Bradley noted that there are still people who believe that Roosevelt had Long killed, leading to a brief digression into conspiracy theories and secret histories, with Linaweaver suggesting that maybe Roosevelt also flew the lead plane at Pearl Harbor.

There was some subsidiary discussion about the Aztecs. Political correctness these days blames the Spanish for conquering them, but the fact is that the Spanish had a lot of help from the Aztecs'

neighbors, who were tired of being captured for human sacrifices. Linaweaver claims the Aztecs were vicious fascists. (Note that he speaks from a libertarian perspective, though I suspect he's right in any case.)

I asked the panelists' views on the "tide of history" versus "great man" theories, noting that the former was in some sense the Marxist view and the latter the capitalist view, leading the former to be somewhat in disrepute these days. I placed myself somewhat in the middle: some things happen because of a unique individual, but there is also truth to Robert Heinlein's "When it's time to railroad, you railroad." McAuley wondered if Marxism itself would have gotten off the ground without Marx to write *Das Kapital*. Since it was based on technological acceleration, would Marxism have arisen if we never got beyond water power? Flynn agreed that the "great man" theory seems the most likely to be true. Linaweaver agreed with me that a mix is the most reasonable guess. He suggested that without Hitler, there probably would have been a World War II, but it probably would have been very different, and the Holocaust would almost definitely have been greatly reduced. He noted that Communism had been based on the work of many people, but National Socialism was entirely Hitler's concept. Other "great men" he listed were Einstein and Tesla. When I suggested that if Einstein hadn't discovered relativity, someone else would have, Fred Adams from the audience said that was true-- that relativity was in the air. I gave the further example of Newton and Leibnitz discovering calculus independently and almost simultaneously. (Christopher Ambler said this sort of simultaneity happens all the time.) Bradley was also middle-of-the-road, giving one example of the "great man" theory the idea that without a Lincoln, the United States would not have survived intact.

Someone commented that the rise of chaos theory has led to "fast" alternate histories, in which change occurs much more rapidly than it did before. It used to be that even after fifty years, things looked much the same as in our timeline, but now things become unrecognizable in a short time. This, of course, makes it more difficult for the reader to connect with the story.

At Flynn's suggestion, I asked the panelists why they thought there was such a fascination, especially now, with alternate histories. Flynn suggested it was wish fulfillment. (Bradley noted that alternate histories strike a basic cord in the human psyche; he is descended from Aaron Burr and might have been king.) Ambler disagreed, saying that we may be interested in some of these alternate histories, but we don't necessarily wish for them. Regarding this, I noted that there are two categories of alternate history: the pessimistic (things could have been better) and the optimistic (things could have been worse). The French seem to like alternate histories almost as much as the English-speaking world, yet their alternate histories tend to be more pessimistic (according to Mark Keller). In particular, they focus on how much better things would be if everyone spoke French. Linaweaver thought that the British, on the other hand, portrayed more dystopias than we did, partly because we are still an empire.

Someone said that most alternate histories focused on people; what about some that focused on diseases, natural disasters, and other events? I noted there have been several based on variations to the spread of the Black Plague (especially the stories in Robert Silverberg's "Gate of Time" anthologies), but other ideas included what if Hurricane Andrew hadn't hit (too soon to show radical change, in my opinion), what if the storm hadn't delayed the Spanish Armada (done by Joseph Edgar Chamberlin as an academic study in 1908), and what if space aliens had invaded us? (For many of these and other ideas, Linaweaver said that work was being done on them, and that Harry Turtledove would be writing them all.) I noted that regarding plagues, 90% of the deaths in the New World after the Spanish arrived were from disease, not warfare.

We cautioned that changes had to be somewhat reasonable, a constraint that many authors don't seem to recognize. Many people look at what might have happened if the South had won the Civil War or Germany won World War II, but close examination shows usually there is no way for their scenario to have happened. Prospective authors should watch James Burke's television series *Connections* to get an idea of causality in history.

I also observed that in alternate histories changing the past changes the future, and maybe this was popular because we want to believe that changing the present changes the future as well. We want control over our destinies, and alternate histories (in general) say that there is *not* pre-destination, but rather free will. (This may have arisen out of Kim Stanley Robinson's comments in his lecture on Postmodernism, when he noted, "The future is going to be different depending on what we do.") In traditional Judaism it is a sin to wish for something that is not possible, e.g., to want to change history. Yet alternate histories give us a way (vicariously) to do this. I also thought that part of my interest was based in my Jewishness--what if the Holocaust could have been prevented?

We never actually figured out why alternate histories were science fiction, although Linaweaver said they were part of the "speculative fiction" aspect of "SF." In history and economics they've been around for a while, as "counter-factuals." In any case, the panelists (especially the authors) said they hoped people kept reading them. Linaweaver also added that he enjoyed alternate histories because he still believed in human genius, and I suggested that the lesson to be learned from them is that one person can make a difference.

At the end, many people requested copies of the Robert Schmunk's alternate history list, an invaluable reference. Linaweaver and Thomas Cron are working on a bibliography in book form, but it's not out yet.

(I would like to note here that John Flynn came *incredibly* prepared for this panel--certainly more than I was. For example, he mentioned that in his reading up, he found that someone referred to change-points as the "Jon Bar Hinge," after the character in Williamson's *Legion of Time*. I would recommend him as a totally reliable panelist for other conventions.)

Panel: **The 100 MPG Engine: Legends That Will Not Die**

Saturday, 10:00 AM

Gregory Benford (m), Rick Cook, Steve Howe, Daniel L. Marcus

"'Suppressed technology.' How do stories get started about cars that run on water, carburetors that allow 90 miles per gallon, and anti-cancer drugs made from common household chemicals?": Well, I had expected a panel talking about technological "urban legends" but instead got one talking about how some of these "wildcat" ideas are real, but not marketable. For example, there are cars that can get eighty miles per gallon of gasoline, but they are undrivable under street conditions: they have no acceleration and constantly backfire. The Wankel (rotary) engine was another idea that failed on its own merits (rather than being suppressed); its fuel consumption was high (about fourteen miles per gallon) and it generated a lot of pollution because the seals were never perfected. (So just what was its advantage supposed to be? I can't even remember.)

And then there was the nuclear-powered airplane. Oh, it would have worked, but sufficient shielding around the fuel would have made it too heavy, so it would only work if you had a crew that didn't mind getting fried by the radiation, *and* it would also irradiate all the land it flew over. But the designers had thought of what to do with it when they were done--they would land it in Antarctica and use that as a nuclear-waste dump. (Luckily, this idea never got off the ground--so to speak.)

And remember SDI? This was described by one of the panelists as a "Fast Eddie" Teller idea, and eventually people concluded that it also had more flaws than virtues.

Other ideas probably were more workable, but not wise. Small nuclear bombs, weighing less than a hundred pounds complete, could be used by guerilla forces in Europe after it was overrun by the Soviets. Well, that was the original idea, but someone apparently realized that given the state of the world, having bombs this small that people could smuggle around was a *really* bad idea.

On the other hand, the L5 solar power satellite sounded crazy initially, but turned out to be a good idea.

But why do we believe all the fantastic stories of great inventions and discoveries, even when they are bogus? (Cold fusion comes to mind, naturally, although it was pointed out that the whole cold fusion thing did teach us a lot about sub-quantum states.) Well, for one thing, we *want* to believe them. Someone (Thomas Hardy, I think) wrote a poem about how there was a legend that on Christmas Eve, animals could talk, and said at the end that he didn't believe it, but that if someone say it were happening in the barn, he would go, "wishing it might be so." Certainly there must be some explanation of why people believe what they read in the *Weekly World News*.

Howe said that one problem is that science nowadays is all done as "big science." His analogy is that it's as if the government of the 19th Century deciding to explore the West with an army that marches together as a unit instead of with lots of small exploration and settlement parties. So the "small science" is left with more than its share of cranks. Benford said that his school (University of California at Irvine), the crank calls are doled out to the various professors. Most fall into two categories: 1) "What was that thing I saw in the sky last night?" and 2) "I have a new energy source that will save the world." Howe asked whether Benford wouldn't be sorry if he rejected someone who turned out to be a genius. "Would I be sorry? Yes. But what are the odds?"

One panelist noted that he is more bothered by stories of suppressed cancer cures than stories of suppressed energy sources, because the latter are usually just humorous, but the former touch people personally in matters of life and death. Someone asked about Linus Pauling's theories about anti-oxidants, and the response was that since he was still walking five miles a day at age 92, they shouldn't be written off too quickly.

One audience member noted that the panelists were referring to crackpots as "he" and asked if they had ever run across any female crackpots, to which Benford responded, "I've dated some." Cook noted, however, that female crackpots seem to be more conspiracy theorists than scientists.

One problem with the whole "suppression" and "conspiracy" theory these days is that suppressing an idea in the United States doesn't do much about suppressing it globally. Of course, there is suppression here, but it is more from the Food & Drug Administration and liability laws than from any secret coterie. In addition (as was noted earlier) the public suppresses things by not buying them and hence driving them off the market. Most products represent a trade-off: you can get more miles per gallon, but only if you are willing to buy a smaller, lighter, slower car. Other products are monopolized (the example given was forceps, invented in the 14th Century but monopolized for a hundred years by one family).

Along the lines of the suppression theories, I recommend David Mamet's *Water Engine*, recently made into a movie for TNT.

(There was a certain irony to the fact that this was opposite the panel on Nikola Tesla, and in fact, there was odd sounds coming over the public address system that may have been coming from the demonstrations associated with the other panel.)

Panel: When Fandom and Real World Politics Collide

Saturday, 11:00 AM

Abi Frost, Jeanne Gomoll (m), Andi Shechter, Ben Yalow

"What should fandom do about boycotts, strikes, war, and real world politics?": Clearly, fandom does need to take note of them: this year's Eurocon was moved to the Channel Isles from Zagreb. But not only lately is there the possibility that conventions will get involved with real-world politics--this has

always been the case. The split in fandom at the first Worldcon (when several people were turned away at the door and went across the street to hold their own convention) was part of a larger dispute between the Left (those turned away) and the Right (those running the convention).

It's convenient to think that fandom is united on social issues, but fandom isn't united on *anything*. There are plenty of left-wing fanzines and right-wing fanzines and other-wing fanzines. The best we can say is that fandom is self-policing and self-censoring: most conventions these days try to avoid taking a stand on one side or the other of any issue. (Iguanacon was a major exception to this, and many fans still resent the "co-opting" of that convention as a political statement. It's true that there are smaller conventions which are specifically feminist or otherwise specifically directed, but these are announced as this way up front.) Fandom is *not* apolitical, perhaps (someone suggested) because fans think about and care about the future.

One need only look at the various awards given out in science fiction to see the breadth of the politics: the Prometheus Award by the Libertarians, the Tiptree Award for examination of gender roles, the Gryphon Award, and so on. There is no consensus on anything.

However, labor disputes are another matter. Given that conventions need to deal with unions in hotels and convention centers, they must keep abreast of current disputes. And someone mentioned that fans sometimes need to be warned not to be arrogant toward unionized employees--sometimes our elitism is showing.

(If fandom were paying attention to the real world, would they be scheduling Worldcons to run right into Rosh Hashonah, as is happening next year?)

Panel: **Will the Future Look Like the Movies**

Saturday, 12 noon

Martin Brenneis (m), Evelyn Leeper, Bill Warren

[Much thanks to Mark for again taking copious notes during this panel, as I can't be on a panel and take notes at the same time.]

"If a present-day cinematic art director could fast-forward to the future, how disappointed would he or she be?": Well, I think the conclusion was that he or she would not see anything like what was portrayed, but probably wouldn't expect to either.

One of the things we noted at the start was that what was portrayed in films didn't actually have to work. The automatic sliding doors in *Star Trek* were actually operated by people behind the set pulling and pushing on them, and the blinking lights on computer panels are often just someone sitting under the panel randomly pushing buttons. Of course, sometimes it's real: *Colossus: The Forbin Project* used the studio's payroll computer for the title character. Warren noted that in the movies, computers had large tape reels long after it ceased in real life (no pun intended) because viewers expected it. And no one really predicted PCs. (For that matter, you have at least half a dozen computers in your house in some form or other.)

It was agreed that in general the future goes at a pace nobody can comprehend. I noted that Bob Lucky (a director of research at Bell Labs) has been quoted as saying that scientists creating the future have no idea what is coming. They thought the Picturephone would be popular years ago, but it was a complete flop (even though the way they showed future in movies in the past was with Picturephones). On the other hand, they totally missed out on how FAX machines and cellular telephones would catch on. Nobody knows what will be popular.

Someone mentioned that the future is often too clean. Brenneis liked the idea that the hydraulics in

Star Wars leaked, leaving spots on the hanger floor. Warren commended Rob Cobb for his work on *Alien* and *Leviathan*, saying Cobb understood the objects he was working with better than the director.

As far as objects go, I commented that they are frequently designed more with an eye for style than with any notion of utility. Citing Donald Norman's book, *The Psychology of Everyday Things* (a.k.a. *The Design of Everyday Things*), I noted that this is somewhat true even in actual objects in use (like clock radios with flush, identical buttons for all functions), but said that even so, the idea of putting the planetary "blow-up switch" in a child's classroom in *Forbidden Planet* seemed like a bad idea. Warren agreed, but felt that *Forbidden Planet* (credited to Cedric Gibbons) was in general a good depiction of a future house and seemed to look like someplace a human being might want to live. Most other films, he felt, showed something totally unlike what a human being would want. Someone in the audience asked when we would see ergonomic designs, such as the pyramidal keyboard--I suspect the pyramidal keyboard will be about as popular as the Picturephone was.

There was also discussion of crazy architecture designs in real life. In Texas there is a building shaped like a dollar sign. I said that reminded me of the old June Taylor Dancers on *The Jackie Gleason Show*, who did synchronized routines that made sense only when viewed from above; to the studio audience they much have looked like random motion. I also remarked that someone at Chicon V had commented that with the shopping mall connected to the hotel connected to the office complex, the "domed city" of the future had arrived. We just don't always recognize the old ideas from science fiction when we meet them in real life. Brenneis said that future cities will be a blend of the old into the new. For example, the Marriott near the convention center looks like a 1950s jukebox. He felt that the future will always have some element of the past, and this was often lacking in films. Too often, everything looks as though it were constructed in the two years immediately preceding the time of the film. Brenneis said it was fun to see holdouts from the past in real life: a CPM computer does as well for typing in as a Cray, so you have a blend of old and new. The old will not go away.

One person noted that they are waiting for roads to look like they do in the movies. Brenneis said he had a friend who worked in a building that had been built to fit into a curve of an old Los Angeles freeway. After the freeway was torn down, the building had a very odd futuristic look to it! I noted that films always seem to have a lot of working mass transit, in spite of the fact that the sorts of things they show (e.g., moving sidewalks) would break down very quickly under heavy use. Althea McMurrian commended *Bladerunner* on doing a good job of portraying a future city, and Bill Warren said that Sid Mead deserved the credit for that. Someone else mentioned *Demolition Man* and Warren said not to expect a lot from that, though it seems to have the idea of the megalopolis: Santangeles, which runs from Santa Clara to Los Angeles. (I assume there has been some earthquake that wipes out the cities north of Santa Clara on the peninsula.) *Wild Palms* was interesting and maybe not too unrealistic, though the technology seemed a bit too advanced.

Someone said that people who make films actually have a strong influence on the future. For example, everyone who saw an LED watch in a James Bond film wanted one. (Of course, just because everyone wanted the jetpack in *Thunderball* didn't mean everyone was going to get it.) Sometimes the futuristic items are current technology, used as product placement (though sometimes the set designer will use them without being paid by the company).

On the whole, clothing predictions are wrong, though Warren reminded us that *Forbidden Planet* did predict the mini-skirt. I remember a "predictor" on *The Johnny Carson Show* predicting that sometime around 1979 all the women in St. Louis would shave their heads. They didn't, but that was the year *Star Trek--The Motion Picture* came out, with a leading actress with a completely bald head. Someone claimed that clothing was very conformist--we were all wearing jeans. This was not entirely true, but it is true that skirts seemed largely to have gone away. I noted that Arcosante, a "planned community," succeeded only by making money from groups of visitors touring it--people wanted to be individuals and a planned community made everyone's homes and lives look alike.

If the future does look like the movies, in part that will be because the movies influence the people designing the future. Or occasionally the people making the movies will do real research (such as for *2001: A Space Odyssey*). When it was noted that this didn't carry through to *2010*, Warren said this is because Kubrick is a genius and the director of *2010* is a hack.

I said I expected to see a more global view of things in the future. John Carpenter does a good job, for example, of showing that not everyone is white in the future--his film's casts reflect the diversity one sees in daily life. (*Time Trax* did this also, but failed on many other counts.) Also, different countries have different views of the future. A Third World country's view of the future would undoubtedly differ from ours.

Panel: **Language: Barrier or Bridge**

Saturday, 1:00 PM

Thorarinn Gunnarsson, Gay Haldeman (m), Michael Kandel, Yoshio Kobayashi, Maureen F. McHugh

"Translation helps bring works to audiences who can't read them in the original, but how are works affected when the words and the grammar change?": The panelists had some commentary on why they thought they were chosen for the panel and what their *real* qualifications were. Gunnarsson said, "I've never done translation work, but I've been annoyed by enough of it." McHugh said that she thought she was on the panel because so many of her stories were about China that people thought she spoke Chinese. She claimed she didn't, but it was clear from things said during the rest of the panel that her Chinese was certainly more proficient than most folks' second languages are.

The first, and perhaps obvious, point made was that translating is not a one-to-one thing. You can't sit down with a dictionary and a grammar and hope to get any sense of what the original meant in the translation. Kandel noted, for example, that objects (nouns) in some languages can have gender, which can lead to interesting word-play if these objects are animate. If "wall" in Spanish is masculine ("el muro") and in German is masculine ("der Wand"), then if a Spanish author writes, "The wall said to her, 'Wake up, dear,'" that will have a different connotation than it would in German (or in English). (I should note that going in the other direction, there *is* a masculine word for wall in Spanish ("la pared"), so that translator would have a way out.)

Kobayashi said that in Japanese there is no swearing (or certainly not the variety we have in English), so translating strong language into Japanese can be a problem, particularly when the literal and figurative meanings of the words are both important. And often etiquette is tied up in language, according to Kandel--for example, whether the formal or familiar "you" is used matters in other languages, but there is no such distinction in English. Sometimes the difference is even more subtle: someone mentioned that Anne Frank's diary was much "livelier" in Dutch than in English, but was unable to explain just quite how.

Other, non-translation-specific, changes can creep in. McHugh said that when the German rights for her novel *China Mountain Zhang* were sold, her agent wondered whether all the characters would sit down to a nourishing bowl of Brand Something soup. When McHugh asked what he was talking about, he explained that in Germany, they sell product placements in books, so the characters might all stop their conversation to sit down to a bowl of their equivalent of Campbell's Soup, and then resume their discussion. (This apparently is the case in the German edition of Kim Stanley Robinson's *Pacific Edge*.) Speaking of product placements, Gunnarsson thinks they are one reason that historical films aren't as popular any more--you can't sell product placements in them.

Sometimes a knowledge of other languages can affect the English original as well. McHugh said that since in Chinese everything is in the present tense, with a "tense marker" at the end of the sentence to say whether it is past, present, future, or what, she wrote *China Mountain Zhang* in the present to give

it that feel. She also thought that, while science fiction may be partially global, it's not yet Chinese. Many concepts which we assume are understood around the world--such as faster-than-light travel and time travel--are unknown outside of science fiction circles and perhaps not known even there.

Science fiction poses its own special pitfalls for the translator. A translator needs to know some science, otherwise you get something like "brown movements" for "Brownian motion." But in Japan (and other countries, no doubt), translators are not educated in science, and scientists are not educated in languages. The result is that it is very difficult to find someone who can translate science fiction well. One thing Kobayashi said was that good style and characters are not important to Japanese science fiction readers (this is undoubtedly a result of the division of education as well), and that the literati hate science fiction. I suppose this makes translating a bit easier--one needn't spend as much time searching for just the right phrase.

Someone of course noted that sometimes it may be necessary to translate English into American or vice versa. "He was left standing outside her door in his pants and vest" means one thing to an Englishman and another to an American.

The panelists agreed that the best translations are the ones you do yourself, but that it was impossible to learn that many languages and translate your work into them and still have time to write anything new. The translators on the panel said it took them about six months to translate the average novel. Kobayashi said Lucius Shepard's *Life During Wartime* took him a year, due no doubt to Shepard's heavy use of stylistic devices. A film novelization might take only one month.

While most translators don't talk to the authors whose work they are translating, sometimes it can be very helpful, as when Joe Haldeman's Japanese translator called up to ask just what he meant by "Unitarians on quaaludes."

Kandel noted that in Italian there is a proverb: "To translate is to betray." Ironically, the words in Italian for "translate" and "betray" are very similar ("tradurre" and "tradire"), forming a word-play that is entirely lost in English.

Panel: **Time Travel in H. G. Wells and Mark Twain**

Saturday, 2:00 PM

Poul Anderson, Mark Twain, Lili Tyler (m), Connie Willis

"Twain sent his Yankee back in time and Wells sent his adventurer forward. Why did each chose the approach he did? Are the conventions of literary time travel still set by these early examples?": I guess I have to explain Mark Twain as a panelist. ConFrancisco found someone (Jon DeCles, if I interpret *Norton Reader* #9 correctly) who could imitate Mark Twain (much as Hal Holbrook is known for doing) and had him as the "Dead Guest of Honor" for the convention, during which time he officiated at functions, served on panels, and gave speeches. The speeches and officiating would be fairly straightforward--write a script and stick to it. But the panels are much more demanding, and Mr. Twain was well up to the task of not only remaining in character as Mark Twain but also of discussing the topic and answering questions that were raised. In this case, for example, when Poul Anderson said, "I have been writing longer than most of you have been in this world," Twain responded, "I've been dead longer than Poul Anderson has been alive." His performance is going on my list of Hugo nominees for Best Dramatic Presentation next time around.

Twain noted that time travel stories get involved with the fact that people believe that they are the end of evolution and the pinnacle of achievement. So backward time travel usually focuses on how ... well ... "backward" people were, and forward time travel often assumes that technology will change but people won't improve. This is probably less true now than in Twain's time--or is that just my making the same error? Willis said this reminded her of *What Happened to Emily Goode after the*

Great Exhibition by Raylyn Moore; a woman attending the Great Exhibition in 1876 finds herself suddenly a hundred years in her future in 1976. But contrary to what people might think, she wasn't thrilled with being in 1976 and really wanted to return to her own time, when things were much better. All this proves is that there is a certain inertia to people, and whether or not what they are accustomed to is better (on some absolute scale, assuming there is one), it *is* what they are accustomed to. As Tyler noted, the most important thing in life to you are *your* problems. What happens to you if you time travel and discover that they don't matter any more?

The panelists pointed out that time travel has many uses. It can be just a puzzle, or a romp, or a study. Tyler said she thought there were more stories about going forward in time than backward, but I doubt that.

Connie Willis said that she used the time travel to the past in *Doomsday Book* to cast light on the present (which is, of course, just what Twain did in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*). Willis said that we are often blind to something right in front of us, and that rather than looking directly at a problem, we need to look at it with peripheral vision.

Someone noted that we are, of course, all travelers into future at one second per second. But there have been legends of people sleeping into the future even before Rip Van Winkle and even before Sleeping Beauty. Mark Twain, however, is thought to be the first author to send his character back into the past.

A brief discussion of changing the past ensued, with people saying that the theory that time is constantly branching can get you out of a lot of paradoxes. Someone proposed the idea of an expanding spatial field of effect, where a change in San Francisco doesn't have an effect in New York until some period of time later (presumably longer than is demanded by Einstein's theories on simultaneity).

Twain felt that time travel should also include those moments when we suddenly realize that time has passed and we are old, or those other moments when we find ourselves pushed back in time (like when as an adult you visit your parents and when you come to the dinner table they ask you if you washed your hands).

Various stories were noted and recommended including *Timescape* by Gregory Benford, *Time Out of Mind* by Pierre Boulle, "The Yehudi Principle" by Frederic Brown, "A Little Something for Us Tempunauts" by Philip K. Dick (Willis's all-time favorite--on reading it, I can see why), "Child by Chronos" by Charles Harness, "All You Zombies" and "By His Bootstraps" by Robert A. Heinlein (the two classics of the genre in short fiction), *The Door into Summer* by Robert A. Heinlein, "Sideways in Time" by Murray Leinster, "Vintage Season" by C. L. Moore and Henry Kuttner (made into the film *The Grand Tour*; it has also appeared under various combinations of their names and their many pseudonyms), *Portrait of Jenny* by Robert Nathan (which weaves back and forth in time), "Compounded Interest" by Mack Reynolds, *Millennium* by John Varley, and the backwards-flowing-time section of the film *Zardoz*. Anti-entropic (time running backward) stories that were mentioned included the legend of Merlin, *Time's Arrow* by Martin Amis, *Counter-Clock World* by Philip K. Dick, and "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button" by F. Scott Fitzgerald. *The Alexandria Quartet* by Lawrence Durrell gives a "multiple view" of time (much as the film *Rashomon* did). And the "Back to the Future" films were full of ideas about time travel.

(In regard to different theories of time, I *highly* recommend Alan Lightman's *Einstein's Dreams*.)

Presentation: **Bantam Books**

Saturday, 3:00 PM

There was a large room curtained off into smaller rooms for presentations by artists, publishers, etc.

The sound-proofing left much to be desired, with the result that I also learned a lot about shading faces in sketches as well as what was upcoming from Bantam.

I have to say that Bantam (Spectra) is my favorite publisher (imprint). Rare is the month that they don't have at least one book I am very interested in, and often it's two or three. (Others seem to agree, since Bantam also had a good percentage of the nominees this year. Only Tor did as well, and it's my second favorite.)

Most of this presentation was just a description of what was coming up in the next year or so from Bantam. There's *A Plague of Angels* by Sheri Tepper (the presenters noted that a review in *Analog* had called her "one of the greats of human literature," which says as much about *Analog* as it does about Tepper). Coming up for the holiday season is *The Art of Michael Whelan* (priced at \$60, it's something you ask your *good* friends to buy for you). Daniel Keys Moran has *The Last Dancer* coming out around the same time, for those Moran fans. Already on the stands is *The Death and Life of Superman* by Roger Stern (\$20 for a novelization of whatever caused the big fuss in the comics). Along with that there is also *The Further Adventures of Superman*, an anthology in paperback, probably edited by Martin H. Greenberg. David Zindell's second novel, *The Broken God*, gets its American release in December in mass-market paperback.

All sorts of new "Star Wars" novels are coming out: Timothy Zahn's third comes out in mass-market paperback in February and Kathy Tyers has one coming out in hardback in January, with a mass-market edition in December 1994. These have been selling so well that Bantam is accelerating their "Star Wars" program. (Oh, well, they have to pay the bills somehow.)

Connie Willis's second collection, *Impossible Things*, appears in January, chock full of great stories (I've seen a galley). Robert Silverberg has a major new ecological novel, *Hot Sky at Midnight*, appearing in hardback in February. (But then, any new Silverberg is a major novel.) In February, we also get the long-awaited *Rama Revealed* by Arthur C. Clarke and Gentry Lee in hardback and *Full Spectrum 4* in mass-market paperback. (Someone in the audience said that *The Economist* had reviewed one of the *Full Spectrum* anthologies and found it "too literary.")

March has a new, extremely thick novel by a new author, *Rhinegold* by Stephen Grundy. This is a retelling of the tale of the Nibelungen. Even better (as far as I'm concerned), in March Bantam issues *Green Mars* by Kim Stanley Robinson in a trade paperback edition. (This is the novel, not the novella of the same name and author.)

Further down the line is an alternate history/time travel novel by Lisa Mason titled *Summer of Love*, in which someone goes back to June 21, 1967, in Haight-Ashbury, and Stephen Bury's *Interface*. Stephen Bury is a pseudonym for Neal Stephenson and J. Frederick George; Stephenson wrote the fascinating *Snow Crash*, so I'm looking forward to this one. There's also a new John Crowley coming out, *Love and Sleep*, and Michael Bishop's baseball fantasy *Brittle Innings*.

On a more general note, their novella series (which includes Frederik Pohl's Hugo-nominated *Stopping at Slowyear* and the I-hope-to-see-nominated *Deus X* by Norman Spinrad) seems to be doing fine. The latest is *Out of Time* by James P. Hogan, coming in November. The Bantam Spectra "Special Editions" line has been discontinued, though the books that would have appeared there are still being published, just without the special label.

And on an even more general note, Barnes & Noble reported that business was up in 1993 over 1992, even after discounting the Michael Crichton--John Gresham phenomenon. What's even more interesting is that the increase is almost entirely due to an upswing in science fiction sales.

By the way, if you like the artwork on Bantam's books, thank Jamie Warren, who is the art director.

Saturday, 4:00 PM

Hilary Ayer (m), William Foss, Josepha Sherman, Karen Shearer Voorhees

"The age of Elizabeth I serves as a model for many cultures we imagine in other universes or on other planets. What was it really like to live in the time of Shakespeare": Well, of all the panels I went to, this certainly classifies as "the panel title most likely to surprise someone who has never been to a science fiction convention." While there was some mention of science fiction (or more accurately, fantasy), this was mostly a background panel on the history of the period so that writers would understand it better before they used it willy-nilly as background in their stories.

The Elizabethan Age was described as an age of transition. It marked the rise of the middle class. Though in many ways we look on it negatively now, it was a society that worked. The whole system of formal social rank resulted in a sense of belonging and a sense of being in place. This sense of belonging was also mentioned by Kim Stanley Robinson in his lecture on Post-modernism and in the "Gender-Bending" panel, so it seems to be a common concern now. I would propose this is because we are a much more mobile society now than ever before and people don't feel they belong anywhere particular. This supposition is somewhat supported by what the panelists talked about a little later: that in Elizabethan times people did not move around very much--in fact, often never went more than ten miles from their village in their entire lives--and that meant that your reputation was important and long-lasting. If you cheated someone in business, you couldn't just pick up and move to the next county and start fresh. A woman's chastity was important because of this life-long reputation, but also, of course, because before contraception, sex usually produced babies. So people cared about what other people thought of them, more than they do now. And people felt that they belonged where they were.

The class system led to a lot of the fashions carried through even until today. Long nails meant that you had someone else to do your manual labor. White skin meant that you didn't work out in the sun. It also meant that you covered your face with a lead-based make-up and probably died of lead poisoning, but what's a little thing like that in the name of fashion? When most work moved indoors during industrialization, suddenly a dark tan became the sign of the upper class--people who had enough spare time to sit around outside and get a tan. Now, of course, a tan means that you're not worried about skin cancer. Women may have followed all these fashion fads, but they were beginning to gain power in the Elizabethan Age as well. In London, the head of the Bakers' Guild and the head of the Brewers' Guild were both women. (One of the panelists recommended *Women of Action in Tudor England* by Pearl Hogrefe for more on this subject. I couldn't find that title in *Books in Print*, but I did find one by Hogrefe titled *Tudor Women: Commoners & Queens*, so perhaps the panelist mis-remembered the title.)

The best-seller of the time was Erasmus's etiquette book, which suggested (among other things) that people dull their dinner knives so that guests couldn't stab each other. This is why we have dull dinner knives to this day, and also tells us that there was some reasonable chance that guests *would* try to stab each other.

The Elizabethan Age also marked a move from intolerance to tolerance (more or less). There was a break-up of the power of the Church which led to a wider range of opinions being tolerated. This was not an all-encompassing toleration; the Jews, who had been expelled from England in 1290, were not permitted to return until the 1650s under Cromwell, and I don't know if the expulsion order was ever formally repealed.

The economy of the period was an economy of scarcity. Clothes were re-fashioned, cut down, re-used, and so on. The largest person in the family got the new shirt, because that way it could make its way down through all the sizes.

The Elizabethan Age was when empires were extended beyond Europe. (This, of course, is a very

Eurocentric view of things. The Mongols might have had a few comments here--or even the Romans.) Before Elizabethan times life was collective; in Elizabethan times it became individual. This means that the Elizabethan Age is really the first period we can understand, or at least that there is a quantum leap in our understanding of it over earlier periods. And this is no doubt why this period serves as a background for so many stories.

Josepha Sherman plugged her book (co-authored with Mercedes Lackey), *A Cast of Corbies*, set in an alternate Elizabethan era.

Panel: **Have Special Effects Taken Over?**

Saturday, 5:00 PM

Martin Brenneis (m), Daryl Mallett

"Have character, concept and story taken a back seat to splashy SFX?": Yes.

Oh, you wanted a bit more than that?

The panelists did point out that many special effects are not obvious, and gave the television series *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles* as an example. It uses photo collages instead of matte paintings, but it does use a lot of them, and people don't think of the show as a "special effects" show. The same is true of a lot of films as well. (By the way, the feeling is that what killed *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles* was not its "academic" nature, but the fact that it never had a consistent time slot or schedule. I enjoyed watching it--when I could find the damn thing.)

Even though the panelists liked special effects (and Brenneis, at least, is involved in producing them), they agreed that special effects are not the meat of films. The analogy I used was that special effects are like the rides at an amusement park: there's nothing wrong with them, but they shouldn't replace libraries.

Too many films rely entirely on special effects and want to use everything available. This gives them a look not unlike the flyers and fanzines one sees done on PCs by beginning "publishers" which use every font available and look like ransom notes. Now that \$10,000 can get someone started in the special effects business with the "video toaster" everyone wants more special effects. And with outlets such as MTV for special effects people (and others) to experiment with different techniques without risking a large-budget film, we will start to see more varied effects. (This is not unlike what was observed in the "Short Story" panel, where it was pointed out that authors can experiment more freely in a short story than a novel, because the time investment is less.)

Of course, the computerization of special effects and animation has led to an interesting rip-off. Those animation cels that are sold in dealers rooms and shops at Disneyworld and other places for recent films such as *Beauty and the Beast* are produced (according to Brenneis) solely for those markets. No one does animation cels for the actual production of an animated film anymore.

And the fact that special effects are taking over (or appear to be) is due in large part to the audiences. As big a flop as *Last Action Hero* was reputed to be and as successful *A Room with a View* was reported to be, the fact remains that many more people went to see *Last Action Hero* than *A Room with a View*.

One audience member felt that people continued to see special effects films in theatres because theatres provided the "total movie experience." Perhaps, but all too often the "total movie experience" includes sticky floors and rowdy audiences. One good reason to see films like *A Room with a View* is that the etiquette of the audience tends to be much higher than that of the audience at *Last Action Hero*.

(J. Michael Straczynski had been scheduled for this panel, but he had also been scheduled for a presentation immediately preceding this and got detained there. In general, conventions should not schedule people on back-to-back panels, especially if they are likely to find themselves involved in a lot of questions afterward.)

Masquerade

Saturday, 8:00 PM

As I noted earlier, there was a 2000-person limit on attendees. We waited in line from 7:30 PM to 8:15 PM to get in, and were somewhere around #1500. One good thing was that they were counting the line so that once it reached 2000 people, they could tell late-comers not to waste time standing in line. They also announced how many places/seats a person could save in line, saving embarrassing incidents (although 4 seats per person in line seems a bit high to me). The VIP seating was not announced ahead of time, which probably should be done if there are in fact seats set aside.

There were fifty costumes. The *Norton Reader* (the daily newsletter) the next day listed forty-six awards. The costumes were almost uniformly (no pun intended) excellent, but that's far too many awards. With that many, they're more certificates of participation. I would suggest perhaps first and second place in each category (Novice, Journeyman, and Master), first and second place workmanship in each category (Novice, Journeyman, and Master), and Best of Show. Caveat: I am not a costumer. If you are, your mileage may vary.

There were also a few costumes listed as original that I would have described as "re-creations": "The Wedding" (based on the Charles Addams cartoon characters), "Vulcan Barbarian," and "Klingon Ceremonial" (both from *Star Trek*).

It was also unnecessary to have a fifteen-minute intermission (which of course stretched to a half-hour) for only fifty costumes. Having the Moscone Center lights randomly cycle on and off during the second half was interesting, but not actually desirable.

After the first run-through, there was supposed to be a videophone hook-up with Arthur C. Clarke in Sri Lanka, but this was preceded by a couple of short films and a lot of waiting. Eventually we left before it was finished. I heard that the final judging and awards ceremony wasn't done until after 2 AM!

My basic suggestions for the Masquerade would be: big enough room, theater seating, entries limited to around fifty, no intermission during the first run-through, fewer awards, and faster awards.

Panel: Northern California in SF/F

Sunday, 10 AM

David Bratman (m), Don Herron, Pat Murphy, Diana L. Paxson

"The where and why of using real world locations in speculative fiction, with examples drawn from the world right outside the convention's doors": I arrived a little late to this, and missed the beginning, but Paxson was comparing using northern California to using Britain as an inspiration. In Britain, she said, there are a lot of structures, ancient and not so ancient, that can be used, and northern California lacks those. But northern California does have legends, and those can take the place of buildings. One of the stories set in the area that she talked about was Ursula K. LeGuin's *Always Coming Home*, set in the Napa Valley in the far future after an earthquake has changed the contours of the land. To get the geography right, LeGuin had a cartographer friend of hers (George Hirsch) construct a three dimensional map of the area, then tilt the appropriate sections and flood it with water to see what the new shapes of the bodies of land and water would look like.

Many authors have used San Francisco as a setting. But do they really have that "sense of place" that is so important? Philip K. Dick had it in *Martian Time-Slip* and other stories, according to the panelists, but Dean R. Koontz's *Shattered* (written under the pen name K. R. Dwyer) made it obvious that Koontz had never been in San Francisco. *The Net* by Loren J. MacGregor did a good job of describing the bars south of Market Street. Perhaps the classic use of San Francisco in science fiction/fantasy is Fritz Leiber's *Our Lady of Darkness*, though Pat Murphy's own *The City, Not Long After* certainly ranks up there.

Regarding her work, Murphy said that her work in the Exploratorium trained her to observe and "see beyond the surface," and that is what lets her see the potentials of settings. Someone apparently mapped out all the places mentioned in *The City, Not Long After*, though Murphy says that the map would probably be a disappointment to try to follow; for example, the vacant lot where the refrigerator sculpture is in the book has no such sculpture in real life (yet!). Regarding this, one of the joys I find is walking around a new place and finding the settings that were described in literature or even other travelogues. And I am not alone--when we were on a boat of about ninety passengers in the Galapagos Islands a few years ago, at least five of us were reading *Galapagos* by Kurt Vonnegut. Murphy also warned that she and other authors often change some details (such as house numbers) to protect the people who live in the houses. You can claim that room 1247 of the Marriott is haunted--it's a public building and "fair game." But if you claim that 1726 Fairlawn Drive is haunted, the people who live there may not like the reputation their house gets. (Does the name "Amityville" ring a bell?)

And of course this sort of desire has spawned the "literary tour" movement, which has two subcategories: tours that visit places mentioned in books, and tours that visit places connected with the authors of these books. Some tours combine both, perhaps showing you where Dashiell Hammett lived and also the places he wrote about. The places connected with authors are often a disappointment--someone said that you go to some house where a famous author wrote his first novel, and you discover that it's being inhabited now by a Vietnamese family who can't understand why you are standing on the street taking pictures of their house. (It's sort of like going back to your childhood home years later. People think you're casing the joint.)

Panel: **The Holocaust in F & SF**

Sunday, 11:00 AM

Eve Ackerman (m), Esther M. Friesner, Lisa Goldstein, David M. Honigsberg

"Does SF/F serve as a useful forum to discuss the Holocaust?": Well, the first question asked was whether you can write about the Holocaust in fantasy or science fiction without trivializing it. Elie Wiesel has claimed that any fiction about it will trivialize it, but Friesner said any fiction about it will keep it alive, and that's important. (The actor Robert Clary, a Holocaust survivor, had also said that it is up to people to make sure it is known that it happened.) As for using science fiction or fantasy, others thought that maybe you needed to approach the Holocaust through metaphor (as in *Maus*) rather than head-on. (This sounded liked Connie Willis's comment on the "Time Travel" panel about using time travel to look at something with peripheral vision. Similarly, someone said that even though we know what's going on in Bosnia, we can't quite grasp it in the present and will only understand it in retrospect.) Goldstein thought fantasy had a particular virtue to bring to a story about the Holocaust, because "fantasy deals with archetypes and deep emotion and can get to places realistic fiction can't." Fiction about the Holocaust tends to be somewhat unpopular, panelists said, because people want to be comforted, not disturbed, but Honigsberg said that "fantasy and science fiction readers have a greater capacity for reading disturbing works."

Ackerman said that in her classes she used *The Devil's Arithmetic* by Jane Yolen to teach teenagers about the Holocaust. She said that it helps American teenagers to connect with that period and those events. The "traditional" book, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, doesn't work as well, because it doesn't have

any characters like American teenagers today--American teenagers just don't identify with Anne Frank. Outstanding writers can make events personal to the reader, and that is what is important.

Can a writer who has no personal connection write a Holocaust book? Well, at Boskone, Jane Yolen said she would not want to see a situation where only Jews could write about Jews, only blacks could write about blacks, and so on, in part because if that is the case, then you can never have a book that includes people from many groups. What people seem to forget, she continued, was that writers *create*. That's what writing is about. Writers are *supposed* to be able to write characters other than themselves. Shakespeare may or may not have been Francis Bacon, but he was not a Jew *and* a Moor *and* a teenage girl *and* a Danish prince *and* an aging king And here Friesner also pointed out that a writer needs to be able to write about people other than herself or himself.

Members of the audience noted that there have been other holocausts. (I was surprised no one had mentioned Jane Yolen's other Holocaust book, *Briar Rose*, notable for showing other victims of the Nazis besides Jews. One of the main characters, for example, is a gay Holocaust survivor.) In addition to the non-Jewish victims of the Nazis, there have been holocausts in Cambodia and other parts of the world. *The Unconquered Country* by Geoff Ryman is an allegory for the Pol Pot era in Cambodia, but on the whole these have been overlooked by science fiction and fantasy writers. (Someone else mentioned *Year 0* as a good non-fiction book about Cambodia. Though I am reasonably sure that's the correct title, I couldn't find it listed in *Books in Print*.)

Honigsberg decried the trend toward books about "Nazi vampires," feeling that they take the blame off human beings. He felt that one of the lessons to be learned from the Holocaust was "the banality of evil." Perhaps, but the message can also be read that the monsters we invent and the evils we attribute to them are no worse than ourselves and the evils we do. It's all in how it's written, and in whether the reader can make that jump in understanding. The book *Paris Trout* by Pete Dexter was given as a work that studied the matter-of-factness of an evil person.

Friesner said that to some extent people had foreseen the possibility of the Holocaust. Jerome K. Jerome at the turn of the century said that "the German people will follow anything in a uniform," and that this was fine if they had a good leader, but what if they got a bad one? Other people, however, then reminded us that it was important in all this to talk about or show individuals, not "the Nazis" or "the Germans," or we are guilty of the same faults.

People were also looking for something that could explain why or how the Holocaust happened. (This is equally true outside of science fiction and fantasy, of course.) There have been some studies done on this. One was the "Milgram Experiment" in which subjects were asked to inflict an electric shock on a person in an isolation booth who couldn't see them. (Unknown to the subject, the person in the isolation booth was actually one of the team administering the test, and there was no electricity flowing in the wires, but the "victim" would simulate a reaction when the subject pressed the button.) The subject had a dial that could set the intensity of the shock and was told that a maximum-intensity shock would kill the "victim." Even so, a surprising number of subjects would follow the instructions given them by the tester to increase the intensity, regardless of the screams of the "victim" and regardless of the warnings given them ahead of time, even up to inflicting the maximum intensity. The conclusion of the testers was that people are conditioned from early childhood to follow instructions, particularly instructions given them by someone in authority (including people in white lab coats), and this often over-rides any "common-sense" morality they might feel. There was also an experiment in a high school in which some of the students were formed into an "elite" group and were indoctrinated as to their "superiority" to the other students. This experiment was ended ahead of schedule when it got out of hand, with the elite students beating up some of the other students who didn't show them the "proper respect."

There have also been studies about why some places fought against the Holocaust. The film *Weapons of the Spirit* is about the village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon in France, which hid as many as five thousand Jews during the Holocaust (and its population was only about five thousand!). The Italians

also were more protective of their Jews than other countries. On the other hand, the United States turned away the ship St. Louis, full of Jewish refugees who could find no country to take them in and which eventually returned to Germany, where most of its passengers perished.

Other books recommended included Janet Gluckman and George Guthridge's *Child of the Light*, Steve Lipman's *Laughter in Hell: The Use of Humor during the Holocaust* (about the use of humor during the Holocaust as a means of fighting back) and Thomas Keneally's *Schindler's List* (based on the true story of an industrialist who saved many Jews by concealing them on the employment rolls of his factory).

(In addition to being an interesting panel, this was also when we ran into Chuck Belov, Mark's distant cousin and about the only other member of his family in fandom.)

Lecture: "My Fellow Savages of the Sandwich Islands"

Sunday, 12 noon

Mark Twain

"Mark Twain was famous not only for his writing, but for his tour on the lecture circuit. Come see him give his most popular speech 'in the flesh': This was in many ways the easiest for Mr. Twain of all his appearances. All he had to do was prepare a two-hour speech and deliver it. (I missed the second hour, so it's possible he had a question-and-answer period.) Compiled from the best of Twain's speeches and writings, it was enormously entertaining, but I will not attempt to relate large sections of it. One representative quote I noted down was his observation that "chamomile tea has nothing on the *Congressional Record* for restfulness." For the rest, ... well, go read all the Mark Twain you can lay your hands on. (If someone videotaped this, let me know if there's some way to get a copy.)

Hogu Ranquet

Sunday, 1:00 PM

It's hard to explain the Hokus. Originally the "Hogu Ranquet" was designed by Elliot (Elst) Weinstein as an alternative to the "Hugo Banquet." As conventions got larger, the notion of combining the Hugo Awards ceremony with a banquet lost favor--it was simply impossible to seat anywhere near the number of interested people banquet-style. But the Ranquet continues, held at a McDonald's (or comparable restaurant if a McDonald's is not available). The awards are honestly bought: to get something on the ballot, you send in money with your nomination; to vote for something costs you a dollar a vote. (Most awards, however, were granted by acclamation, with no vote-buying needed.)

Since I was nominated in one category I felt obliged to attend. It was a lot of fun, even though I had to miss the second half of Mark Twain's speech and another panel. Whether I would go every year is not clear; it depends on its competition. It did give me a chance to eat lunch--a rare event for this convention.

And the awards were:

- | The DeRoach Award: given for putridity in every day life, inspired by Edward DeLoach, LA City worker who held his testimonial dinner at McDonald's: Barney the Dinosaur
- | The Aristotle Award: commemorating the Greek Tycoon, Aristotle O. Nessus, the elusive founder of putridity and the originator of the phrase, "Ook Ook Slobber Drool!" For Grand Master Lifetime Achievement in Putridity: Geraldo Rivera
- | Best New Feud: Starting 1992 or later to qualify. Tag Team Action: Carrier vs. Sacks vs. ConFrancisco (write-in)
- | Best New Feud: Starting 1992 or later to qualify. Singles Action: Boston in '98 vs. Boston in

- '01 (write-in)
- | Best Traumatic Presentation: Neverending Masquerade Part Deux (write-in)
- | Best Religious Hoax: "Pro-Lifers" Who Kill Doctors and the Priests Who Love Them
- | Best Hoax Awards: ConFrancisco Hogu Nominations (write-in)
- | Best Type Face: ConFrancisco Dingbats
- | Best Professional Hoax: Hoaxing as a profession: Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms
- | Fandom's Biggest Turkey: Chris Carrier (write-in)
- | Worst Fanzine Title: No Award
- | Best Dead Writer: Must be living to qualify: The Battlecrock Galactica Award: William Shatner
- | Best Hoax Convention: I-95 in '95
- | Best Pseudonym: Noah Ward
- | Devo Award: To who has done the most to HARM science fiction: William Shatner (write-in)
- | Best Has-Been: (Deposed Dictator's Award): Chief Daryl Gates
- | Best Fan Hoax: Any and all New York Worldcon bids (write-in)
- | Cusinart Award: (Worst Editing TV, Movies, Fiction, etc.): *Mystery Science Theater 3000*
- | Special Grand Bastard Award: Bill Gates (write-in)
- | Most Desired Gafiation: Winner to get Mid-Atlantic Fan Fund (MAFF): Chris Carrier
- | Free for All: "Impeach Clinton, and Her Husband, Too!"
- | Special Bagelbash Award: Poultry Geist
- | Best New Disease: Con Chair Sudden Death Syndrome (a.k.a. Bid Death)
- | Most Bizarre Hall Costume: Real or Imagined: Miss Catonic
- | Best Alien Music Video: Koresh Family Singers, "We Didn't Start the Fire" (write-in)
- | Mixed Media: The Amy Fisher Story--Times 3
- | Closest Encounter of the Third Kind: Gay Elves in Bondage
- | Space Geek of the Year Award: Evelyn C. Leeper
- | Traffic Jams, Jellies, & Preserves Award: Parc 55 Elevators
- | Banger Award: (Most Inappropriate Con Guest of Honor): Robert Socks Clinton
- | Most Erotic Line from *Star Trek: Deep Six Nine*: "The spots don't go all the way down, Julian."

For "Space Geek of the Year" I beat Dan Quayle, Admiral Stockdale, and Steve Urkel. Part of this was no doubt due to heavy campaigning on the part of Matthew Tepper for me--I wonder why?

Also awarded were the Blackhole Awards:

- | Standard Blackhole: Jesse Helms, Rush Limbaugh, Pat Robertson, Prince Charles
- | Invisibility Award: For conspicuous absence: Mars Observer (write-in)
- | Incompetence Award: Political Refuse Award: Janet Reno and ATF
- | Publisher's Award: Bridge Publications
- | Greed Award: Creation Cons
- | Half-Assed Con Officiousness: The "Connie" Award: ConFiasco
- | Brown Hole Award for Outstanding Professionalism: Chris Carrier

It was decided to have a filksong category, which would always be awarded "the *next* year."

"Hogu Nominee" ribbons were given to all the attendees, courtesy of the ConFrancisco committee. It seems someone suggested to the committee that among all the ribbons they print, they should include "Hogu Nominee" ribbons as a joke and sell them for fifty cents each. Whoever heard this didn't realize that there really *was* such a thing as a Hogu (even though Weinstein had received a special Committee Award from Chicon V in 1991 for creating them), and it was only after Weinstein saw a bunch of people wearing the ribbons that he found out what was going on. At that point he went to the committee to protest and someone who knew what a Hogu was stopped the sales and gave him the entire remaining stock of ribbons.

(Note in passing: I wasn't at the WSFS Business Meeting, but clearly Chris Carrier managed to annoy

a lot of people to get elected in *four* negative categories.)

Panel: **Getting Around the Solar System**

Sunday, 2:00 PM

Jim Baen, Suzanne Casement, William S. Higgins, Gentry Lee, Jonathan V. Post (m)

[written by Mark R. Leeper]

The panel started with the members introducing themselves. Gentry Lee was director of scientific analysis on the Viking Mission and a co-author with Arthur C. Clarke. Bill Higgins is from Fermi Labs. (Personal note: He also put together the science program at Chicon which in my humble opinion was the best at any Worldcon I have ever attended.) Jon Post works on research into nanotechnology, worked on the Magellan space mission and also Voyager 2. Suzanne Casement is a graduate student at UCLA. (In general Lee is more an advocate of unmanned robotic information-gathering missions. Higgins, active in the National Space Society, wants man to become a space-faring race and would much rather see manned missions than mechanical proxies.)

Post suggested that the first half of the discussion concentrate on what is currently being done in space and what will be done for the next thirty to fifty years. Later they would get to longer term. Lee thought that on the short term the emphasis would be on unmanned missions mostly. Manned missions would be mostly be "Antarctica-type" colonies. With robots we can do a lot more. Decisions have to be made who will pay for space exploration where are we going to go. The Challenger disaster was a real tragedy for the program and now engineering foul-ups, like on the recent Mars mission are making things worse for funding. The Mars Observer was an important lynch-pin and would lead to a lot of future planning. Losing it will cause a huge problem in deciding on new missions needed. We are now going for smaller craft that will have smaller ranges.

Post asked what major changes did members see coming. Higgins said there will be more of a push from the NSS to make hardware that is small and smart. He suggested that there would also be a look at other methods of propulsion. We still seem to be using the same old chemical propulsion rockets and we are nowhere near trying some other propulsion. He expanded on the National Space Society's position saying that they are working to create a space-faring civilization and that they will really push for anything that will forward that goal. Particularly favored are plans to do prospecting on the moon and asteroids. However, the NSS is not particularly pushing for the missions to map Venus since it seems unlikely that Venus will be a near-term source of resources.

Casement said that in November a wide-field camera will be put in the shuttle for the Hubble telescope. It will be used to look at the planets and design missions. However the problem with the Hubble is that its designs were frozen about ten years ago in order to be able to build it and it would be much more effective with up-to-date technology.

From there the discussion moved to Post's work experiences. He talked about his work on the Titan 34D. They worked to improve designs on that. His group made basic improvements to the shuttle like using multicolor displays. They also worked on error detection to predict component failure. Among the things that he worked on were a proposal for advanced launch systems including single-stage to orbit. One scheme he proposed included using a huge ground-based laser to power a craft. However, he feels that even if there is research into other propulsions, it will be a long time before rockets have much competition for sending things into orbit. He did discuss using solar sails once equipment is in space. Also he said he had invented a magnetic sail using magnetic field to push huge loop of wire. One of the long-term proposals was to build a craft out of solid hydrogen, cryogenically frozen, so that when it gets to its destination the entire structure could be used as fuel. If there is ice at Mercury's poles, he suggests that we purify the water and use the poles as a fuel depot near the sun.

Lee considered all the possibilities and said we are in a sort of Burgess Shale point in technology. In the period of the Burgess Shale being formed there were many and very diverse life-forms. Some seem very strange to modern eyes. Evolution pared them down to a few successful types of life-forms and the rest died out. Technology is at a similar stage when there are many baroque ideas for how to solve problems of space travel. The vast majority of these will be discarded. With all the different possibilities for powering cars we have basically one kind of car, one powered with the petroleum-fueled internal combustion engine. We have basically one kind of rocket, and we will find which of the current weird ideas for space travel are the best of the lot and the rest will all be discarded. There will be one or two space transportation systems in the future. There will be one or two kinds of propulsion. Lee thinks that in the future we will be seeing primarily robot-control in space in the future. People will fly but not be doing the driving. He sees no compelling reason to put people into space.

Higgins responded with a defense of placing people into space. He said that we are in a time of rapid technological evolution. There will come a time when it will be cheaper and more convenient than today to send people into space. At that point far more people will want to travel in space. Scientists would like to be near what they study. And the biggest product from space will be information. A lot of people on earth will want to learn about new places.

Post asked the panel what is it that calls to us from beyond the solar system and how will we answer that call.

Casement said that people have an interest in finding other solar systems. JPL is already investing in interstellar exploration. But if there is an explorer mission to stars it will take a long time to get data back. Closer to Earth there is Voyager and Pioneer sending data back about more distant destinations and they are still finding interesting things.

Post observed that Gentry Lee sees no compelling reason to send people to the stars, but that does not mean that people will want to go anyway. Post asked what it is that pushes people. Why did people in the United States head west? Most were not looking to get rich, they were fleeing a society they could not stand.

Lee countered that they could breathe in California--they will not be able to do that in space.

Post asked if price came down, would people go? In the days of the Western expansion the cost of a covered wagon and the provisions to go west would be about \$300,000 in modern money. If the cost comes down to \$300,000 to go to Mars, he expects people will go. And everything said in this panel assumes nothing big is going to happen. If we find proof of alien intelligence, everything changes. If things get so bad on Earth that we will have to escape that will also push us into space.

Lee did not envision a massive move into space. He polled the audience as to how many people they thought would be living off Earth in 500 years. Most said they expected the number to be more than a million.

Panel: The Past Seen Through Fictional Eyes

Sunday, 3:00 PM

Stu Shiffman, Susan Schwartz (m), S. M. Stirling, Harry Turtledove, William F. Wu

"How historical fictions (including alternate history ones) really reflect present day concerns": The panel did not really address the specific topic, though the first observation here was that xenophobia is the most universal human value, and that's what we see the most of. We have a tendency to see most victories in the past of one group over another as good, and the losers as wrong in their beliefs or attitudes, but that is because the victors write the history books, and as L. Sprague deCamp said, they

write it with "satanic gusto." Perhaps we realize this, because Stirling claims that "there's a tendency these days to go overboard on the cultural relativism thing" in compensation. For five hundred years, Columbus was great and the native Americans were savages; now the native Americans are great in spite of their many flaws (such as human sacrifice) because "that was right for their society." Oddly enough, the cultural relativists aren't so forgiving of the Europeans and their cultural quirks, such as imperialism. Then again, someone pointed out that it's easy for the victors to flagellate themselves symbolically and say how guilty they feel. After all, it costs them nothing once they've won to say how sorry they are.

Regarding the whole issue of non-interference in other people's customs, Stirling cited Napier's comment when he tried to ban suttee in India and was told that suttee was the custom there and he shouldn't interfere. Napier said that it was an Indian custom to burn widows, and it was a British custom to hang people who burned widows. They could carry out their custom and he would carry out his. (In science fiction, Sheri Tepper's *Sideshow* is set on a planet where cultural relativism and non-interference are carried to an extreme, and should give cultural relativists some pause.)

But in spite of this theoretical trend toward cultural relativism, it is still very difficult to make a culture with very different values sympathetic to the reader. Stirling can certainly relate to that; in attempting to portray his Draka fairly, he's managed to convince a large number of people that he is a fascist, when he's trying to say the Draka are the *bad* guys.

The panel warned against imposing our values on other cultures. By this they were not suggesting cultural relativism, but rather saying that when we study a period or a people we should understand that those people had different beliefs than we did. For example, during the Inquisition, people thought that torturing people to get them to accept the Church was reasonable, because that would save their souls from eternal torment, and what was a short period of pain on earth compared to what they would suffer if they didn't accept the Church? We may not agree with this, but we need to realize that the people of that time frequently were acting out of what they saw as love, and not from an innate cruelty. This doesn't make them right, but it does affect how we view them.

The panelists also warned against historical revisionism. They were not talking about the obvious things (like those who claim the Holocaust never happened, though these are the first people that come to mind when the term "historical revisionism" is mentioned), but also such books as Jean Auel's *Clan of the Cave Bear*, in which a single character discovers just about everything of value to civilization. Or as Stirling expressed it, "A rock. A rock. If I put them together--a porch!" (Turtledove is guilty of this in his "Agent of Byzantium" series, where in each story the main character discovers or adopts from barbarians some amazing new invention: the telescope, inoculations, etc. He at least has the defense that this is an *alternate* history, but I find it stretches the bounds of probability.) People agreed that it was okay to change some details (especially in an alternate history, as I noted), but (as Stirling put it), "you have to know when you're not being true."

Someone asked what historical periods we were especially interested in. Turtledove said that World War II and the Civil War seemed to be the most popular; Shiffman added the period of our expansion westward across the continent, and Shwartz added the Vietnam War era. As for who or what would be remembered from our time two thousand years from now, the only person the panelists could agree on was Adolf Hitler.

For a good book that talks about how to look at history, I would recommend Josephine Tey's *Daughter of Time*.

Panel: **Mark Twain as a Character in Science Fiction**

Sunday, 4:00 PM

Mark Twain, Jody Lynn Nye, Hayford Peirce, Bruce Holland Rogers (m)

"Twain has been a major character in many SF/F stories. Why? What are the advantages and disadvantages of using a well-known person in fiction?": The advantages are somewhat obvious. The author has a ready-made character, with a background that the reader already knows, and does not have to do any of the work of filling that character in. The disadvantages are perhaps less obvious. With many characters, the reader will have pre-conceived notions that are at odds either with history or with what the writer wants the reader to think about the character. The example given here was Richard III, who was nowhere near as evil as Shakespeare and others portrayed him, but that image has become so firmly fixed in people's minds that using him *authentically* will probably not ring true with the reader. Also, in fiction one cannot always stick strictly to the truth about a historical character, especially if one wants him or her to interact with fictional characters. So authors must change some details, and picky readers (such as myself, I admit) often object to this. Both of these relate to how one deals with "the history we know that just isn't so." If everyone believes George Washington chopped down a cherry tree and then told his father he could not tell a lie, does an author write that, or does he write what really happened (assuming that anything even remotely similar to this did occur)? Robert Silverberg in *Up the Line* has a bit of fun with this, when some of his characters go back to hear someone deliver a very pious line at the dedication of a Hagia Sophia and instead hear him swear most colorfully at whoever left the scaffolding up by mistake.

One way to use real people without changing details is to use the "missing periods" in their lives. For example, one panelist suggested using the period of ten days that Agatha Christie was missing in a story if you want to use Christie, because no one can say that she was doing something else instead of what you say. (Well, if you have her fly to Mars, they may object.)

Another disadvantage, especially in writing about current figures, is that the references may be transitory, or local. A reference to Jesse Helms may be meaningful in the United States now, but it's not going to go very far in Europe now, or probably even in the United States in twenty years. And references to people in the entertainment media can be even more transitory. Would having Marlene Dietrich as a character in a story do much for the average reader under the age of thirty?

Regarding Twain, at any rate, one panelist (not Mr. Twain) said that using Twain as a character at least guaranteed good dialogue. Of course, it also guarantees cliches--Mark Twain as a character in a novel will say all the things that everyone knows Mark Twain said. Using Oscar Wilde as a character has the same benefit, and the same drawback. If the reader *knows* when Twain (or Wilde) said a particular thing, then reading him saying it at some other occasion entirely is particularly jarring.

Of course, one reason we see Twain and Wilde and others literary figures as characters is that authors like to write about authors. John Kendrick Bangs used Twain in *The Literary Guillotine* and also wrote *A Houseboat on the Styx*, a precursor to Philip Jose Farmer's *Riverworld*, which also used Twain. Twain (and others) remain popular as characters, according to Nye, because the author (and the reader) needs a "larger-than-life character, one who leaves larger-than-life footprints."

Historical personages as characters can get tiresome. Ellen Datlow has said that she never wants to see another story with a famous person as a character unless it's written by Howard Waldrop, and I have a similar feeling about all those Sherlock Holmes pastiches in which Holmes has to meet Teddy Roosevelt, or Sigmund Freud, or Lenin, or whoever. Still, it's possible to do a story with a famous person as a character well even if you're not Howard Waldrop, and so you should probably take this as a caution rather than an outright ban. It would help if people wouldn't always pick the *same* historical people to write about.

Of course, with alternate histories or time travel stories it's very easy to use historical figures. But you need something besides the gimmick of the person to make the story work.

Hugo (and Other) Awards Ceremony

Sunday, 8:00 PM

And the winners are:

- | Novel: *A Fire Upon the Deep* by Vernor Vinge (Tor) and *Doomsday Book* by Connie Willis (Bantam) (tie)
- | Novella: "Barnacle Bill the Spacer" by Lucius Shepard (*Asimov's* July)
- | Novelette: "The Nutcracker Coup" by Janet Kagan (*Asimov's* Dec)
- | Short Story: "Even the Queen" by Connie Willis (*Asimov's* Apr)
- | Non-Fiction Book: *A Wealth of Fable: An informal history of science fiction fandom in the 1950s* by Harry Warner, Jr. (SCIFI)
- | Dramatic Presentation: "The Inner Light" (*Star Trek: The Next Generation*) (Paramount Television)
- | Professional Editor: Gardner Dozois (*Asimov's*, various anthologies)
- | Professional Artist: Don Maitz
- | Original Artwork: *Dinotopia* by James Gurney (Turner)
- | Semi-Prozine: *Science Fiction Chronicle* edited by Andy Porter
- | Fanzine: *Mimosa* edited by Dick and Nicki Lynch
- | Fan Writer: Dave Langford
- | Fan Artist: Peggy Ranson
- | John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer of 1991-1992 (Sponsored by Dell Magazines): Laura Resnick
- | Special Committee Award: For building bridges between cultures and nations to advance science fiction and fantasy: Takumi Shibano
- | Seiun Award for Best Novel Translated into Japanese: *Tau Zero* by Poul Anderson
- | Seiun Award for Best Short Story Translated into Japanese: "The Groaning Hinges of the World" by R. A. Lafferty
- | Seiun Award for Best Non-Fiction Translated into Japanese; *The Minds of Billy Milligan* by Daniel Keyes
- | Big Heart Award: Marjii Ellers
- | First Fandom: Ray Beam

Yes, they got all the winners' names correct.

Well, that was certainly ... interesting.

And interesting is an understatement. This is the first year there has been a tie for best novel since 1966 when Frank Herbert's *Dune* and Roger Zelazny's *And Call Me Conrad* (a.k.a. *This Immortal*) shared the honor, with 702 ballots cast in this category. (841 people voted in all, down from last year's number.) *Science Fiction Chronicle* beat *Locus* by one point (out of 623 ballots cast in the category)! This broke a very long streak for Charlie Brown, and Andy Porter got the only standing ovation of the evening, and wearing his formal academic garb, declared, "These are not the robes of a Doctor of Divinity, but bless you all." Peggy Ranson won by two points in a category where 361 ballots were cast. At the other end, *Dinotopia* was a runaway winner, with 327 votes to the next closest's 85. Warner's book had 203 points to the next closest's 100. (Please do not ask me to explain the preferential ballot system!) Connie Willis got a big laugh in her thank-you speech for "Even the Queen" when she said she had complained to Gardner Dozois on winning the Nebula for it that she would now have to go home and tell people what it was about--and she didn't know what to say. "Tell them it's a period piece," suggested Gardner.

The Seiuns were moved back with the Hugos, leaving the rest of the other awards flapping in the breeze. The Prometheus Awards (*The Multiplex Man* by James P. Hogan for Best Libertarian Science Fiction Novel of 1992, and *The Dispossessed* by Ursula K. LeGuin for Hall of Fame) were announced at "Speakers' Corner" in the Concourse, the Electric SF Awards didn't seem to be announced except at the ClariNet booth (I assume I would have been told, since I won the Best Fan Writer award), and I have no idea when or where the other awards were given out. (The Rhysling Award for Long Poem went to "To Be from Earth" by William Daciuk; for Short Poem, to "Will" by Jane Yolen.) Strong

suggestion number something-or-other (I've lost count): Worldcons should make provision for an alternate awards ceremony, in a suitably festive room (not just an abandoned panel room). If nothing else, they should be awarded at the opening of the Con Suite in the evening (perhaps one or two a night), since people do congregate there. While I'm suggesting, I would also suggest a time limit on speeches be given the nominees (it has been done before)--most speeches were short, but some were quite long and I could hear the crowd getting restless. The planners did separate the non-Hugos from the Hugos with a ten- or fifteen-minute retrospective of the Hugos, which was similar to what was done last year in Orlando. Ironically, during the retrospective, Toastmaster Guy Gavriel Kay talked about the many Hugos *Locus* had won, and referred to Charlie Brown as "always a bride, never a bridesmaid"! Kim Stanley Robinson holds the professional "Always a Bridesmaid" record, by the way, having been nominated nine times without ever having won. This, in my humble opinion, is grossly unfair, and it's unfortunate in a way that he had such stiff competition this year.

The traditional "Hugo Losers Party" afterward, hosted by Conadian, was remarkably under-attended, many of the pro nominees having apparently decided to go to the big Dell party being thrown in the Con Suite. However, they missed some great food: smoked whitefish, cheese, fresh vegetables, pickerel cheeks in a sauce being cooked to order by a chef, and fresh raspberries. Since I hadn't had dinner, I was quite pleased with this arrangement.

And on a personal note, though I placed fourth in my category, I did get the most nominations. And however much that surprises you, trust me--it surprises me more!

Panel: **Books You Should Read**

Monday, 12:00 noon

Janice M. Eisen, David Kyle, Eric M. Van

[written by Mark R. Leeper]

"Some personal recommendations, not limited to SF, of what the well-read fan should read and why": This is a relatively commonly given panel. In this installment the participants were Janice Eisen, a reviewer for *Aboriginal Science Fiction*. Eric Van is a co-founder of Readercon. Eric is famous for somewhat idiosyncratic tastes, nearly the opposite of those of the third panelist David Kyle, member of first fandom and author of *A Pictorial History of Science Fiction*. Kyle's expertise is predominantly in the science fiction of the pulp and sense of wonder days. Kyle arrived late.

Van started out the panel by distributing a sheet he wrote for the occasion called "Books You Should Read." Included are such odd choices as Graphic Novels: *Cerebus [the Aardvark]*, *Daredevil*, and *Watchmen*. His humorous must-reads include *The National Lampoon High School Yearbook Parody*, *Firesign Theater's Big Book of Plays*, and any collection of Bob and Ray. He includes a guide to rock 'n' roll by Paul Williams. He also lists two baseball Must-Reads. Under the category of "Change Your Worldview" he includes a Miss Manners etiquette book. Let's be fair: some of his must-read list includes some very good books, but it is clear his tastes are not necessarily shared by most people.

Van began by picking a book at random from his sheet. "*Arslan* [by M. J. Engh] *really* blew my mind." It is about a despot who wants to do terrible things. In reading it you will understand a little better how a Hitler could do the things he did.

Eisen had made a list of the core of the best standard science fiction books. Choosing at random she found Cordwainer Smith's "Rediscovery of Man" series. Smith is an acquired taste. Nearly all of his science fiction is in the book *The Rediscovery of Man* being sold at the NESFA table. There is also a novel *Norstrilia*, sold out because of Harlan Ellison's histrionics.

Van talked about "slipstream," a term applied to mainstream writing that has fantasy elements. He

said Kurt Vonnegut is epitome of slipstream. He also recommended *Krazy Kat: A Novel in Five Panels* by Jay Cantor. He says the novel works on about four levels; it is humorous, serious, it is poetic. The comic strip character Krazy Cat witnesses events in history like the Trinity bomb.

Eisen said she did not like angst-ridden superheroes in comic books, then she saw *Watchmen*. She said she "was knocked over by it." It did things she didn't think were done with super-hero comics.

Van said he agreed with every word and strongly recommended *Watchmen*. The most ambitious thing in the comic book field is *Cerebus the Aardvark*. Each of the books is thick like a phone book. Each ends with closure, but the next one picks up seamlessly. He calls the books "mind-bogglingly ambitious." He suggested that readers try to get the first one. It does not start profound but gets so as it goes along. He also recommended Frank Miller's redefinition of the Batman story with *The Dark Knight*. He attributes to Miller the current rebirth of popularity in Batman and the resulting Batman films. Earlier Miller took over the comic book *Daredevil*, Marvel Comics worst-seller, and turned it into their best-seller.

Eisen wanted to recommend two books of science fiction criticism. She likes Damon Knight's *In Search of Wonder*. She really likes Knight's writing style which could often be humorous and perceptive at the same time. The book contains a complete "dissection" of A. E. van Vogt, and not to van Vogt's advantage. He can be cruel. She also recommended Ursula K. Leguin's *Language of the Night*.

Van said he was going to recommend a book that sold three million copies but never got respect, *National Lampoon High School Yearbook Parody*. He has read it cover-to-cover. The more you read, the more you get out of it. It really captures the spirit of the 60's.

Bridge of Birds by Barry Hughart was Ms. Eisen's next recommendation. It is hilarious. She also thought very funny David Langford's *The Dragon Hiker's Guide to Battlefield Covenant at Dune's Edge*.... It seems like a parody of every popular fantasy/science fiction novel within reach.

Van then revealed what he said was "the best book ever written," John Crowley's *Engine Summer*. He had read the book and then circumstances forced him to reread almost immediately after finishing it. He discovered "all the stuff [he] missed." (One wonders if he had been forced to read more books twice in succession, if there would not be more "best books ever written.") The book is "a utopian novel set after civilization has fallen apart. That is only the tiny tip of iceberg."

The next books recommended by Eisen were Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* and *The Big Sleep*, and *Kim* and *Captains Courageous* by Rudyard Kipling. She also suggests people read Dickens, but choose one you didn't have to read in school.

David Kyle, just arriving, said Dickens is a pulp writer who made it. He talked about the pulps and their precursors, the penny dreadfuls. Many writers pre-SF writers used a great deal of imagination. In *Gulliver's Travels* there are islands in air and many strange worlds. Many of the classic fantasies are forerunners of modern fiction. What many people think is dry and outdated is not dry at all. The basis of much modern fantasy is right there.

Van seconded this testimonial for the classics. "*Paradise Lost* did not blow my mind but it was good. I got a real buzz from it." The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were Eisen's recommendation.

Someone from the audience recommended T. S. Elliot's "Four Quartets."

Van suggested *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is great fantasy.

Kyle said that for more examples read *A Pictorial History of Science Fiction*. Someone in the audience asked the author. Kyle pretended to be searching his memory and then as if he found it said

brightly "David Kyle."

Van called David Pringle's *Science Fiction: The 100 Best Novels* "a superb book." The same publisher published *100 Best Fantasy Novels* which Van said was good up to Tolkein, then not so good. Pringle found a different publisher for his hundred-best fantasy novel list.

Eisen said that the one book she wanted to get to in this panel was *How to Suppress Women's Writing* by Joanna Russ.

Kyle responded to the earlier mention of T. S. Elliot. When you mention poetry Tennyson comes to mind. His "Locksley Hall" is almost a song to science fiction.

Eisen thought the best post-holocaust novels were Walter Miller's *Canticle for Liebowitz* and Edgar Pangborn's *Davy*. (I wonder how much consideration she has given to Leon Uris' *exodus*.) She recommended two publishers: the Collier Nucleus series and the publisher Carroll and Graf are both putting good older works into print. (I can second the opinion on Carroll and Graf. And with that comment, my Worldcon came to an end. I rushed to the Huckster room to buy one last book--published by Carroll and Graf, by the way--and returned to my hotel.)

Panel: **Gripe Session**

Monday, 12 noon

Much of what I learned or heard about different aspects of the convention has been expressed in the appropriate section of this report; most of my gripes have been expressed already as well. But a few random items belong here, I suppose. Several people said that they had been contacting the convention with program ideas and offers to work, but never got any response, or got a response just a few weeks before the convention (when they had first written over a year earlier). One problem seems to be that if someone suggests something that doesn't clearly fall into one particular section (for example, something that isn't quite programming, and isn't quite exhibit), then it gets batted back and forth and no one wants to take responsibility to follow up on it.

The claim was made that using the larger hall in the Moscone for the Masquerade and Hugo Awards Ceremony would have added at least \$20 to *each* membership in the convention. This seems hard to believe, but it underscores the fact that Worldcons are getting too big to be handled in any reasonable and cost-effective way by more than a handful of cities. (Exercise for some Worldcon historian: how many cities which have previously hosted Worldcons are no longer able to do so, from a facilities stand-point?)

Ellison's panels were in such small rooms, according to the committee, because Ellison came to the committee two and a half weeks before the convention (after all the programming had been laid out) to tell them that he was attending and what time-slots he wanted to speak in.

There was a lack of intermediate-sized rooms: Larry Niven's Guest of Honor speech was in a room holding about 140. The next largest was one holding about 1500. It was decided that it was better to have him speak to a crowded room than a half-empty one, but future conventions should make sure they have at least one room for mid-sized events.

The letters to people who volunteered to be participants but were turned down was a point of contention. No matter how delicately they are phrased, they still will sound like the recipient is being told he or she is not important enough. As it was, ConFrancisco said they had more participants than MagiCon, and possibly more than Noreascon.

People were encouraged to volunteer; the committee claimed it took 10-20% of the attendees to help run a Worldcon. For their part, committees are reminded to touch base with volunteers at least every

three months, even if only to say, "Yes, we have your name and will be sending more specific information soon."

The daily newsletter should carry all the various awards presented at the convention (see my notes on "other awards" above), and obviously this means that the presenters of awards must have press releases or the equivalent to give the editors of the newsletter.

Various Media Presentations

[written by Mark R. Leeper]

Nearly each year Evelyn and I go to the World Science Fiction convention. In 1976 at MidAmerican a then nearly unknown George Lucas came presenting materials from his upcoming film *Star Wars*. While I would not rule out the possibility that it had been done before, this was certainly the first example I saw of a filmmaker using a science fiction convention like this. Starting that year popular film seems to have changed a lot in its pacing and also how it is merchandised. And one way is that more and more upcoming films seem to have previewed at science fiction conventions.

Over the years I have seen two major changes in these presentations. The first change is that rather than one filmmaker at presenting his own film, there were package presentations at which some "hired gun" who had sold his services to the studios would be presenting a whole package of films--sometimes from different studios. The other change was somewhat more subjective. The films seem more derivative and--well, lets admit it--much less exciting.

This year things are looking up ever-so-slightly. There is one upcoming television show that looks decent--actually, better than decent. But there is a lot coming up that I for one am going to be less than excited about. You can read that to mean that they look cheap, derivative, and way too much like things that have been bad in the past.

In the media presentation there were several teasers for the television series *Lois and Clark*. So far the cleverest thing I have seen about the series is the title, though I suspect some of the audience will not recognize the allusion to the famous expedition. Of course when I say that is the cleverest thing I have seen, it is about all I have seen. The whole presentation was three teasers implying that Lois Lane and Clark Kent would end up in bed with each other. Presumably it should be obvious that there are logic problems inherent in this inter-species coupling. Also poor Lois would probably be badly damaged by the man whose flesh is harder than steel. The same idea was explored in detail in the Larry Niven story "Man of Steel, Woman of Kleenex." My enthusiasm for the concept of sexy Superman stories is highly bounded.

Similarly we saw little more than teasers about *seaQuest DSV*, an expensive new series set in the ocean starring Roy Scheider and something that looks a lot like a rubber Flipper stand-in. There is lots of nice looking hardware but no sign that anything of great value will come from the program. Steven Spielberg is producing.

And speaking of famous people with initials S.S. (hey, I am admired for my clever transitions) Sylvester Stallone looks like he is aiming for *Terminator* with his *Demolition Man*, but it sounds like he will end up closer to *Freejack*. The concept is that the worst criminal in all the world (played by Wesley Snipes) is captured by a reckless, but effective cop nicknamed the "Demolition Man" (played by Sylvester Stallone). Unfortunately a bunch of innocent people are killed in the process. So both criminal and cop are sentenced to cryogenic suspension--freezing. (Moral: In a topsy-turvy world, a good cop is treated like a criminal.) For Stallone the sentence is just some fifteen years in the freezer which implies the congealing of all that body oil into grease. For Snipes the sentence is eternity. It is not entirely clear why waste the freezer space on someone who is never going to thaw, but I guess there are precedents. (Also I guess some of the stuff at the back of our freezer at home is in pretty much the same state.) Flash forward some long time to a pristine and crimeless future--don't ask me

how we got there from our present with ever-growing numbers of criminals, bad inner cities, racism, and ever-increasing library overdue incidents. Society is too effete to handle real crime, but through a nasty freezer accident Snipes escapes and is terrorizing utopia. Luckily we have a macho greaseball on ice in the fridge. It's at times like this that society learns to value its macho greaseballs. (Incidentally, all of this was in a trailer I had seen weeks earlier at my neighborhood theater, and there was nothing in this tacky presentation I didn't already know.) This is not a film to look forward to.

We saw a trailer and little more for *Robocop 3* and what we saw made it look like little more than the mindless shoot-em-up that *Robocop 2* was. This time the evil system is against Robo and has made him a criminal. (Moral: In a topsy-turvy world, the good robocop is treated like a criminal.) I don't expect much here. Incidentally, Peter Weller is replaced by someone I could not recognize under the makeup, but he wasn't Weller or probably anyone else well-known.

One of the longest running of the great super-heroes is Lamont Cranston, who learned in the orient the ability to cloud people's minds so that he is essentially invisible. When he is invisible he is his alter-ego, The Shadow. Now nobody ever really knows what The Shadow really looks like since he was a hero of radio and pulp magazines. All you ever see is an artist conception of a man with a long crooked nose under a big concealing hat. It's enough to give you the willies. It is tough to judge who would make a good Shadow on the screen in the upcoming Shadow film. Basil Rathbone is pretty close, he might give you the heebie-jeebies if he was hiding somewhere in the shadows. Maybe they should get some unknown for the part in the film. But an unknown would give you no marquee value I guess. So instead got the modern equivalent of Basil Rathbone, the man with the commanding presence, with the deep voice, with the slightly scary looks. Yes, they cast as Lamont Cranston... Alec Baldwin??? (Oh barf! Well I guess he would be marginally better in the role than Julia Roberts.) We did see some production sketches on this one and the production seems to be in the hands of people who would rather emulate successful films about Batman than to try to understand the persona of the Shadow. At least one mistake: in the long-running radio show, which is where the Shadow became best known, all of his powers and all of his tools came from between his ears. He had no special cars or gas pistols. Everything he did was by mental powers. Well we saw a sketch of his office where an iris opens up and his chair sinks down when he wants to make a getaway unseen. As if he couldn't walk out right in front of his secretary and simply cloud her mind. He is, after the Shadow. Or he was before they started the film. Mechanical gimmicks are right for Batman but all wrong for the Shadow.

Oh, and speaking of weird casting, Stan Winston, an Oscar winner for special effects like those of *Jurassic Park* was on hand to defend the casting of Tom Cruise as the Vampire Lestat in *Interview with the Vampire*. He talked for a long time about the film but at the same time said very little. He had brought a slide of what Cruise will look like as Lestat, but could not show it since it might be videotaped and of course it must be kept in extreme secrecy for whatever reason filmmakers always like extreme secrecy. I guess there is some danger that some other filmmaker will cast Cruise as Lestat in some other film and use the same makeup. In any case we heard how *great* Cruise was as Lestat, but learned little else of value.

Lest it sound like there was nothing good to look forward to in upcoming productions, J. Michael Straczynski was present to show what was coming up for *Babylon 5*. I want everyone to remember that after the pilot was broadcast, it was me who said that I was willing to trade two episodes of any *Star Trek* series for any one episode *Babylon 5*. Reactions to the pilot were very mixed, but I was really impressed by what I was seeing. I am already preparing to say "I told ya' so." I would now say that the two for one trade underrates "*Baby 5*" (as I have nicknamed the series, without loss of respect). We saw about twenty minutes from one of the episodes and forget the series, I really want to know how the episode will come out. It involves a conflict between two species, one good, one evil. The problem is that you can only determine which is the good species and which one is evil if you know if the spirit dies with the body or if souls are somehow reincarnated to live again. And *Baby 5* isn't going to tell you. It seems like a lot of the episodes are going to hinge on philosophical principles that the viewer is going to have to decide for him/herself. Straczynski says his goal is to start arguments and perhaps a few good bar fights with his series. It has been a while since we have seen

science fiction sophisticated enough to do that. The British do that at least on occasion, but American SF in film and television seems to have the flash of effects but rarely the spark of any real intelligence.

Of course *Baby 5* will have its "toaster graphics" which certainly are impressive. They substitute a sort of artistic feeling for the realism of effects that the current *Star Trek* shows seem to use. The effects in *Baby 5* look more like animations of the book covers use, particularly British ones. They are imaginative and for the time being it is very impressive to see sights like spaceships unfolding solar sails like giant metallic insects. I would say, however, that the novelty of that sort of effect is bound to wear off over the projected five-year run of *Baby 5*. This is particularly true since "video toaster graphics," the kind used in *Baby 5* are a lot cheaper than those created by Industrial Light and Magic, and *Baby 5* has no exclusive on them. That means we are probably going to see similar effects very commonly. The special effects are not going to be that much of a draw after the first six months, but I think that the story will be. I am just a little concerned about a series that is going to be hard to join in the middle because of what the viewer has already missed. For now I intend to watch faithfully and I suspect that once the series gets going, I will not be alone.

Miscellaneous

At each of the last three conventions I've gone to, someone has mistaken me for Connie Willis. I almost got through ConFrancisco without this happening, but just as we were leaving the convention center for the last time, someone passing us asked his friend, "Do you have *Doomsday Book*?" and when she handed it to him, held it out to me. I probably just should have signed it, but instead I said, "I am not Connie Willis. I am not as tall as she is, I do not have the same hair color as she does, and I didn't win two Hugos last night." Maybe I'll have a button made!

The WSFS Business Meeting was at noon instead of the traditional 10 AM on the days it was held, and at the ANA Hotel, making it very difficult to get to. As a result, attendance was down. The Northwest Territories Division Amendment, the amendment clarifying the best fan writer definition (making it clear it is for work in the previous year), and the amendment reducing NASFiC lead time passed. These had previously been approved at MagiCon, so are now adopted. Passed and passed on to Conadian is an amendment authorizing retrospective Hugos for 50, 75, or 100 years previous to a given convention, so long as Hugos were not awarded for that year already.

The hotel had an automatic check-out through the television, but we couldn't use it when we were checking out at 5:00 AM. Luckily, there was no line. :-)

The Information Desk was not always helpful. In particular, a friend of ours asked them about parking on Sunday and Monday, because the Moscone Center Garage which was recommended in the Pocket Program was closed those days. First the person he talked to said he should look in the book. When he pointed out that he had, and that it was wrong, they basically told him to try checking with some other garages, at which point he thanked them for their help (no doubt somewhat sarcastically). As he was walking away, the person behind the desk (who must have thought he was out of earshot) said something extremely uncomplimentary about him. The Information Desk should have information, or be willing to find it, perhaps asking the person to check back later. It should under no circumstances be rude and offensive. (This applies even if the "customer" is, though knowing the person involved here, I doubt that was the case.) I would like to think this was a single individual rather than a constant problem at the Information Desk, but a convention should make sure that only people who have the right personality for that job work at the Information Desk.

Panelists were signaled with a "YIELD" sign when there was fifteen minutes left, and a "STOP" sign when time had run out. This was confusing--many panelists thought the "YIELD" sign meant they had to yield the room. It was a good idea to keep panels to fifty minutes instead of an hour, because that gave people time to get to the next item and maybe even have a bathroom break.

ConFrancisco did not provide a free drink to participants at the "Meet the VIPs" party as had been done by previous conventions. Frankly, this is probably a good thing. It seems a better use of the money to spend it on something for the con at large, and I doubt anyone's attendance or non-attendance at the party is determined by whether they get one free drink.

As is traditional, I'll list the Worldcons I've attended and rank them, best to worst (the middle cluster are pretty close together, and it's getting harder and harder to fit the new ones in, perhaps because the cons of fifteen years ago are hard to remember in detail):

Noreascon II
MagiCon
Noreascon III
Noreascon I
Midamericon
L.A.con II
ConFrancisco
Chicon V
Discon II
Seacon
Confederation
Chicon IV
ConFiction
Conspiracy
Iguanacon
Suncon
Nolacon II
Constellation

This con report runs about 24,000 words, due in large part to the abundance of interesting programming. (At Chicon V I went to twelve panels; at MagiCon I went to sixteen; this year at ConFrancisco it was twenty-four plus two lectures.) I will also admit to a certain verbosity.

Unlike the last couple of years, the site selection was *not* a hard-fought battle, Los Angeles (Anaheim) being uncontested. 1286 votes were cast, compared to last year's 2541. James White, Roger Corman, Takumi and Sachiko Shibano are the Guests of Honor. Connie Willis is Toastmaster (their word, not mine). Elsie Wollheim is the Special Guest. (The Fan Guest of Honour for Intersection (Glasgow 1995) was supposed to be announced at ConFrancisco, but wasn't--at least not that I heard.) The convention will be called L.A.con III (this is what is known as the "typography from Hell") and will be August 29 to September 2, 1996. In spite of the uncontested nature, it was apparently decided that people could *not* buy attending memberships at voting time (as was done with MagiCon), so on Monday there was quite a long line of people wanting to upgrade to attending membership. Bruce Pelz found himself working alone for a while until help arrived, but I'm surprised that the LA committee didn't realize their table would be swamped. (Contact address in the United States is L.A.con III, c/o S.C.I.F.I., P. O. Box 8442, Van Nuys CA 91409.)

Next year in Winnipeg!

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