

Magicon 1992
A convention report by [Evelyn C. Leeper](#)
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[What you hold in your hands--or on your screen--is an example of manic con report writing. I foolishly took a vacation for a few days after the con, and will be leaving on another in three and a half weeks, so I will do my best to get this done in between. Please pardon any mistakes that slip through.]

MagiCon, the 1992 World Science Fiction Convention, and the 50th World Science Fiction Convention, was held September 3 through September 7 in Orlando, Florida. The attendance was quoted as 5903, as of 2 PM Sunday. There were a fair number of Europeans (Orlando is more accessible than Chicago was last year), including the now usual contingent of CIS fans selling Soviet memorabilia to help finance their trip. I think their prices have gone up though. :-)

We arrived in Orlando Thursday afternoon after a somewhat hectic flight (we left Newark Airport seventy-five minutes late and made our Raleigh connection only because American Airlines held the connecting flights, bless them. So I've now been in North Carolina for about five minutes). We

checked into the Peabody only to discover that Dave and Kate were unable to check in because their names were not listed for the room. I blame the Orange County Convention Bureau--I had listed all the names, and I suspect they're the ones who dropped the names. But we got this straightened out, and they had a car to leave their luggage in until we arrived.

Facilities

The convention facilities were very good. The convention center had patio seating in the center, with a concession stand for those who wanted food or drink. The exhibit hall, message board, etc. were right next to this, and the dealers room and art show were at the back of this hall. The meeting rooms were also close by. The only inconvenient items were those scheduled in the Clarion, which was about a block away. The distance was not great, but there was no good path between the two, and the rooms in the Clarion were not well marked (and there was no map of the Clarion in the Pocket Program). The Con Suite was in the Peabody and reportedly not much used.

The restaurant situation, on the other hand, left a lot to be desired. Without a car, there were only about eight choices, most fast-food-type places. There was a Denny's for breakfast, and the hotel coffee shop in the Peabody was not really too over-priced. If you had a car, there were several more possibilities.

As with last year, I would complain that a ballroom was used for the masquerade and the Hugo ceremony rather than a theater-type room (which provides much better visibility). There was no closed-circuit broadcast, and the line for the masquerade was quite long. (I didn't see the Hugo line, and we eventually left the masquerade line and used our press ribbons to get forward seating. Writing these con reports is good for something, after all. :-))

Registration and All That Stuff

Registration was fast, although I had to go to three different places (four if you count getting press ribbons): the main registration, program participants' registration right next to it, and the Green Room for Hugo nominees' registration. (Note that I'm not complaining about the latter, so don't feel obliged to stop nominating me to save me from all that.)

There were reportedly nineteen different ribbons for the various types of "special" people (including one that said "This Completes The Set"!), all in different colors (unlike last year, when staff and program participants both had red ribbons, for example). The Hugo nominee rocket pins were back to the high quality of two years ago; last year's were bigger but not as well-executed. Badges were available with either clips or pins. As is universal, the newsletters were late, but not as late as last year's (though if anyone has number 8 or the hoax newsletter, I would love a copy--we had to leave before those arrived). There were several convenient drop-off points.

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, with enough *Sneakers* buttons for everyone to get two or three (it seemed), but not as many *Dracula* buttons as there were takers. *Candyman* buttons were mirrored, but thankfully these were plastic rather than glass, or there could have been problems with broken buttons and sharp edges. MagiCon handled the button handouts themselves, putting out portions of them in lavender buckets every free hours. This was good for two reasons: it helped eliminate the mess when people just dump the buttons on the tables, and it gave everyone a chance to get some (because they weren't all gone after the first day or so).

Program Books

The Pocket Program once again had an index by participant. However, since 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), I didn't really use the Pocket Program,

or even carry it around. For the third year in a row, the descriptions of the various panels were not in the Pocket Program, though the trend to descriptive rather than cutesy titles continues--for which I am thankful. There was also a time grid for the program items and the schedule closely resembled the Pocket Program's schedule, with only minor panelist changes after it went to press.

As I noted before, the maps could have been more complete.

The Souvenir Book was truly great! In addition to all the usual stuff (Hugo nominee list, WSFS Constitution, etc.), there were biographies of all the guests of honor, eight articles, six short stories, and a novelette. In his editorial Jon Gustafson talked about how he rarely found anything in the Souvenir Book (a.k.a. the Program book, though the program is never printed in there any more) worth reading or keeping and wanted to do something different. Well, he did. Chicon V came close, in having an anthology *Fantastic Chicago* published in conjunction with the Souvenir Book, but it cost extra and this did not. I just hope people actually looked at the thing instead of having given up long ago. (I must admit I didn't open it till I got home.) Again, an excellent job, and a tradition to keep up for future Souvenir Books!

Green Room

The Green Room was well laid out, with coffee available most of the day and sodas in the afternoon after the coffee ran out. It was well-staffed, with schedules posted, and on the whole better organized than last year's. There was some confusion about whether name cards would be in the Green Room or Program Ops (next door), but this was truly minor. My major complaint 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.

The Green Room also gave me an opportunity to get travel advice on the Southwest from Fred Lerner, and to have Jerry Pournelle look at me two or three times, finally peer at my badge, and say, "You're not Connie Willis. I thought you were, and that you were cutting me for some reason." I suppose I look a little bit like her; we have the same style glasses and similar haircuts. (I told Willis this story; she found it amusing, and signed the book I was having her autograph as "Your clone, Connie Willis.")

Dealers Room

As last year, the Dealers Room (a.k.a., the Hucksters Room) was very large, with a lot of books, but also a lot of non-books. I actually found a couple of books I had almost given up hope on. There may have been an index--I didn't notice. The need for wheelchair accessibility seems to indicate that the cramped aisles of Worldcons gone by are indeed a thing of the past.

Art Show

The amount of humorous amateur art seemed to be lower this year, and there was some very high-quality stuff in the regular show and in the Vincent DiFate 50-year speculative art retrospective, which consisted of the works of dozens of artists from DiFate's collection. The spaciousness of the Dealers Room was also evident here. I have no idea how the economics worked out, since everything I like has long since moved out of my price range. I did buy three Tom Kidd prints in the dealers room though. (A friend did say that the purchase procedure was the most efficient she had seen.)

Programming

The Pocket Program lists 420 program items, while Chicon V had 520 program items, ConFiction 337, and Noreascon 3 833 (all not counting films or autograph sessions). There were also 73 videos, 36 films, 37 autograph sessions, and 42 readings. Since the electronic schedule did not break the panels down by type, I will not give a percentage breakdown as I did last year. In spite of the lower

total number of items, there were more panels and other events at this convention of interest to me than at the previous conventions. In fact, I went with almost all my time scheduled between 10 AM and 6 PM every day except for six hours over the whole weekend! Congratulations to Priscilla Olson and staff for a job well done!

Given that it's impossible to see everything at a Worldcon, I will cover just the programming I attended. I would note, however, that one friend of mine highly commended the science track (in particular, the NASA track, and another thought the art track was excellent).

Panel: Well Read Fan: Books

Thursday, 3 PM

Gregory Bennett, Janice M. Eisen (moderator), Tim Illingworth

This started with some people thinking that the idea was to name books that would help the reader understand fans, so *Fallen Angels* by Larry Niven, Jerry Pournelle, and Michael Flynn was mentioned. (Why no one listed Sharyn McCrumb's *Bimbos of the Death Sun* and *Zombies of the Gene Pool* I don't know.) But it rapidly got into a listing of what a fan should read to be considered well-read and knowledgeable in the field.

This consisted of just about every author you can name.

Seriously, a panel that gives people *hundreds* of books to read is too intimidating. There were some useful comments. The panelists recommended *Locus* for current events and admitted that the field was getting too broad for anyone to cover completely. Eisen said that the well-read fan should never admit to having read anything media-related, with the possible exception of John M. Ford's *How Much for Just the Planet?*

In anthologies, panelists recommended the Dozois "Year's Best" anthologies for staying current, and the *Orbit*, *Universe*, and *Dangerous Visions* anthologies for what the field was like in the 1960s and 1970s (though they agreed that *Dangerous Visions* was not so dangerous any more). Also suggested were the *Science Fiction Hall of Fame* anthologies, and the various anthologies of Hugo and Nebula award winners. For that matter, reading the list of Hugo- and Nebula-award-winning novels and short fiction would not be a bad basis to start your project on.

It was pointed out that many of the older works are coming back into print in a variety of "rediscovery" series. I suggested the Terry Carr Ace Science Fiction Special series (the first one), and the Groff Conklin and Judith Merrill anthologies, as other resources.

Someone in the audience asked for recommendations on current "hard s-f space opera"; the panelists suggested C. J. Cherryh, Charles Sheffield, and Lois McMaster Bujold. Someone else noted that it was interesting that two of the three leaders in this field were women.

Ironically, H. G. Wells and Jules Verne were not mentioned until the very end, and even then the panelists seemed to think that today's readers would find them unreadable. (Then again, this was the same convention that had a panel on Edgar Rice Burroughs as a "neglected author," so maybe the readership is going downhill.)

Panel: Bookstore as Supermarket--Growth of Mega-Bookstores

Thursday, 5 PM

Glen Cook, Scott Edelman (moderator), Michelle M. Sagara, Brian Thomsen

First, the definitions: a mega-bookstore (a.k.a. "superstore") is one that has more than 10,000 square feet of floor space. As a comparison, the specialty book store Sagara owned had about 1200 square feet. And the history: at some point, the chains realized that they had to expand their selection or lose business. First they expanded into non-books (videotapes, computer software, etc.), but recently they have discovered that people come into book stores to buy books (what a concept!) and have sharply cut back on the other items. (It should be noted that some stores, such as Barnes & Noble, have always realized they needed a broad selection. The Barnes & Noble store in downtown Manhattan would have qualified as a mega-bookstore before the term was even invented.) Some companies tried different focuses for different subsidiaries (e.g., Coles and the Book Store in Canada are owned by the same company, but aimed at different markets). Thomsen thought that while this was true, even a superstore can't offer everything--they are constrained by what is in print, available from distributors, etc.

The issue is also compounded by the customer base. A specialty store (such as the Science Fiction Shop in New York) needs a certain population density to survive. A mega-bookstore, by appealing to readers in all categories, can be successful in less densely populated areas. I could see a mega-bookstore surviving in Rapid City ND where a specialty science fiction shop might have problems.

Unfortunately, the panel rapidly drifted off-topic onto general issues in the publishing and book-selling industry. The returns policy, beaten to death for years now, was given a few more whacks. Scott compared the practice of having stores return just the covers of unsold books for credit ("stripping") to the auto manufacturers telling the dealers, "If you don't sell that car, send us the ashtray and a note saying you destroyed the rest." Thomsen said that one reason he felt that TSR has a sell-through rate of 80% (compared with an industry average of 50%) is that it doesn't allow stripping--dealers must return the entire book. This gives them an extra incentive to gauge better how many to order, or to keep the books on the shelf longer before returning them. The "downward spiral" phenomenon that comes out of this was also cited: if a chain orders 60,000 of author A's first book and sells 40,000, then they will probably order only 40,000 of A's second book and maybe sell 30,000 of those, and so on.

The discount policy also came under fire. While Random House offers better discounts to customers with lower return rates, many companies offer better discounts to chains than to independent booksellers.

Piers Anthony came under fire (through some long train of discussion I can't reproduce). Someone claimed that Anthony's problem was that he was writing what sells this month (i.e., writing to follow trends). Sagara said that Anthony was not writing what sells this month, to which Cook added, "His [Anthony's] problem is he's writing too much of what he sold last month."

There was some further discussion of remaindered books, but nothing I noted down, and clearly the panel had drifted well off topic. As to the question raised by the topic, Sagara (who owned a specialty shop) seemed to think the megastores were not a threat to its existence, and Glen currently sells only at conventions, so until Barnes & Noble buys a booth in the dealers room, he's not worried.

(Though the superstores are thought of as run by chains, the United States's largest bookstore is an independent bookstore, the Tattered Cover in Denver, which has 42,000 square feet.)

Meet the VIPs

Thursday, 8:30 PM

Mike Resnick (Master of Ceremonies)

As is often the case with these parties, it was too noisy actually to meet anyone successfully. The party was supposed to be held around the pool, which would have let the noise drift up and away, but

was instead moved to the ballroom in the Clarion, where the noise could bounce off the walls and make the place even louder. Resnick did his best to read off the names of the VIPs as they were handed to him, but I suspect most people couldn't hear him and weren't paying attention. Plus the people being introduced weren't up there; they were wandering around the room. Resnick is a very good speaker and this was a real waste of his talent.

(Oh, as the VIPs came in, they were given a plastic lei. Somehow one of my friends got in without the greeters seeing him, and was complaining that everyone was getting "lei-ed" but him. So I dragged him back to the entrance and got him "lei-ed.")

Autographing: **Connie Willis**

Friday, 10 AM

Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine had various authors autographing at their booth as well as the authors doing regular autograph sessions, so I used this opportunity to get Connie Willis's autograph. I hadn't brought any books with me to be autographed (because of the fact we would be traveling around after the convention), but a friend had offered to bring back stuff in his van, so I picked up a couple of Willis's books that I didn't have yet: *Light Raid* (which she co-authored with Cynthia Felice) and a Pulphouse Short Story Paperback, "Daisy, in the Sun." Pulphouse Short Story Paperbacks are great for just this purpose--they are small, lightweight, inexpensive, and entirely suitable to ask to have autographed. I told her about Jerry Pournelle in the Green Room (see above) and we talked about her story "Even the Queen," which I predict will make the Hugo ballot next year (along with her novel *Doomsday Book*).

Panel: **Have We Ever Listened? Does Admonitory SF Ever Pay Off?**

Friday, 11 AM

Roger MacBride Allen (moderator), Michael Kandel, James Morrow, Richard Paul Russo

Allen (and, yes, it is "Allen" rather than "MacBride Allen") opened the panel by saying, "Let's talk admonitions." Russo said that in his writing he isn't so much trying to push a particular point of view as just to get people to think. Morrow, on the other hand, said that he does try to affect people's opinions, but doesn't think he reached enough people with *This Is the Way the World Ends* to take credit for ending the Cold War. "However," he said, "sales have dropped off, so maybe we need to start another arms race, maybe with China."

Allen contended that "admonitory s-f has indeed saved the world, and nobody noticed," in that he believes the Cold War stayed cold because of all the post-holocaust fiction which was written. It is certainly true that such works as *On the Beach* reached a wide enough audience that there is undoubtedly some truth in what he says. Kandel observed that the use of parables to get a message across was not exactly new. As for how closely fiction and reality match up, Allen observed, "One of the differences between fiction and life is that fiction makes sense."

The question of whether all this (the end of the Cold War, an interest in saving the environment, etc.) would have happened *without* admonitory science fiction was touched on, but of course there is no real way to tell.

At this point Allen asked the audience to list some books that changed their lives ("Testify!"). Everyone agreed that everything they read shaped their thoughts somehow, but books listed as effecting a major change included the Bible (of course), James Blish's *Torrent of Faces*, Harry Harrison's *Make Room! Make Room!*, Robert Heinlein's *Podkayne of Mars*, Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *1984*, Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, Philip Wylie's *End of the Dream*, and Dr. Seuss's *Lorax*.

Morrow cautioned the audience that a lot of these books are negative (dystopias) and "it's too easy to be a nihilist." That's a terrible message to send the next generation, he said. A lot of things enter our folklore from books, and sometimes we aren't even aware of them. Fans have a folklore that says we are smart and mundanes are stupid, and believing this can cause a lot of problems.

(At the beginning of the panel, when everyone was introducing him or herself and talking about his or her latest books, someone on the panel--I don't think it was Morrow himself--described Morrow's book *Only Begotten Daughter* as "the sequel to the New Testament, completing the trilogy." I guess he wasn't counting the Apocrypha. Oh, and by the way, in connection with a previous Usenet discussion, Morrow describes *City of Truth* as a dystopia and a nightmare city, so to whomever it was who said they thought he was saying in that book that the unvarnished truth was a positive thing, I offer this as fairly strong opposing evidence.)

Panel: **Media SF for the Literary Fan**

Friday, 12 noon

Gail Bennett, Evelyn C. Leeper (moderator), Jim Mann

We started by defining media science fiction to include film, television, radio, and the theater, and then proceeded to ignore totally the last two. Oh, well.

We also defined the "literary fan" as someone who is primarily a reader; a more precise definition than that could not be achieved. We also agreed that we did not want to have this turn into "media-fan bashing"--all too often this sort of discussion becomes the media fans versus the literary fans. One reason that media science fiction is criticized by "literary fans" is that there is much less produced in the way of movies and television shows each year than in books, so when it comes time to list good works of the previous year (e.g., for the Hugo nominations), it is much easier to come up with five worthy books than five worthy movies, and any list of recommended works for a particular year will be book-heavy and movie-light.

I asked the panel to start with some general statements about what type of media science fiction the literary fan looks for, since I knew that soon enough it would devolve to a listing of movies and television shows. While I suggested that to be appealing to the literary fan, a piece had to have more than just special effects, someone pointed out that authors use visual effects also: for example, Homer's description of Achilles's shield. Still, a film such as *Death Becomes Her*, which has nothing going for it *except* its visual effects, is unlikely to appeal to a fan looking for more literary qualities.

Eventually, of course, we ended up with a list of recommendations, including *Bladerunner*, *Carrie*, the HBO version of *Cast a Deadly Spell*, the BBC version of *Day of the Triffids*, *The Dunwich Horror*, the PBS version of *Fool's Fire*, the BBC version of *The Invisible Man*, *Kafka*, the PBS version of *The Lathe of Heaven*, *Naked Lunch*, Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books*, *Soylent Green*, *Village of the Damned*, and various episodes of *Dr. Who*, *The Outer Limits*, *Ray Bradbury Theater*, *Star Trek*, and *Twilight Zone*. It should be noted that most of what was mentioned were adaptations of written science fiction or fantasy, with the exception of many of the television shows. Someone suggested that one reason so many television shows and made-for-television movies showed up on this list was that television can have a more leisurely pace than films. I'm not sure I agree with this. If someone pays their \$7.50 in a theater, s/he are likely to stay for the whole film, but on television, if a show doesn't grab them in the first fifteen minutes or so, s/he will often just change the channel.

Autographing: **Pat Cadigan**

Friday, 1:30 PM

The autographing table was in one corner of the exhibit area, and conveniently located near the

dealers room. Again, I hadn't brought any books with me to be autographed, but I picked up a couple of her books in the dealers room that I didn't have yet: *Letters from Home* and a Pulphouse Short Story Paperback, "My Brother's Keeper." Cadigan found it a bit odd that I asked her to inscribe *Letters from Home*, a book of feminist stories, to both Mark and myself, but that's how we do things.

Panel: **Alternate History Stories**

Friday, 3 PM

George Alec Effinger, Michael F. Flynn, Bruce Sterling, S. M. Stirling, Harry Turtledove (moderator)

Alternate histories are popular these days--this was a large room and it was packed. Then again, the title of this panel was so broad that it probably attracted anyone who had any interest in any alternate history.

In order to narrow down the topic a bit, the panel addressed in particular the characteristics of a good alternate history. H. G. Wells's principle was cited: you're allowed to make *one* fantastic assumption, and then everything has to follow from that. (No, I don't have a source to cite for that.) In other words, a good alternate history should be disciplined extrapolation, with everything proceeding from the one change. As someone said, there shouldn't be any "oh, by the way, I forgot to mention" (I think that Turtledove's "sim" stories violate this principle; they assume that *Ramapithecus* survived in the Americas and also that the Asians never crossed the land bridge across the Bering Strait.)

Writers should also keep in mind all the consequences of their change. Turtledove cited a particularly egregious example in this regard (he didn't name it, but it was Kirk Mitchell's *Procurator* series in which Rome defeated the Germans *and* Jesus was not crucified): in spite of the German defeat, Constantine is still born and becomes emperor. Of course, Mitchell also violated Wells's principle by having two changes, though when Jesus not being crucified was mentioned, Effinger and Turtledove both said, "Jesus who?" reminding us that one man's alternate history change point is another's reality. (Has anyone ever commented on the peculiarity of Turtledove, a Jew, writing about an alternate history in which Mohammed, the founder of Islam, instead becomes a Christian priest?)

It's also important for authors to realize that, as Heinlein said, "When it's time to railroad, you railroad." In other words, even those who subscribe to the "Great Man" theory of history need to accept that some trends or discoveries are inevitable. If James Watt hadn't perfected the steam engine when he did, someone else would have very soon after. If Columbus hadn't discovered America for the Europeans, any one of dozens of explorers sailing around at the time would have done so soon after. Now it's true that if a different country got to America first, things would have been different, but to write a story in which no one gets here misses the point. On the flip side, you can't have a technological innovation until the underlying technology is there, so having steam engines in ancient Rome, before the metallurgy was developed for them, won't work. (Of course, every rule has an exception: Gregory Benford's "Manassas, Again" seems to work as a story in spite of doing just this.)

Along these lines, writers should also avoid having over-long survival of ancient ideas. (Mitchell's books suffer in this regard as well; the form of the Roman Empire hasn't changed in 2000 years. This is highly unlikely, as it was undergoing change even in the era of Mitchell's change-point.) As Turtledove said later, "People screw up so that no states are permanently successful."

And a warning that I frequently ignore: don't dump all your research into the book. Long descriptions of every detail of life in some time period are more likely to bore than enthrall the reader. (My review of *Alternate Kennedys* is a prime example of this; I had all the family tree information, so I included it. But in my defense, at least I stuck it in an appendix.) Connected to this is the idea that your change-point should not be overly obscure. If it is, you have to find some way to explain it to the reader *gracefully*--and this is not easy.

The issue of utopian versus dystopian alternate histories was raised. I think this boils down to whether we are saying things could be better or things could be worse, and I suppose the relative percentages would tell us something about our state of mind. (Anyone out there want to do the research?)

But why write alternate histories at all? Well, for one thing, they let the author write about our world safely by letting him or her set it elsewhere. Authors can now write about Germany winning World War II and having fascism fall fifty years later, and readers can construct the parallel to our own world.

Mention of the fall of fascism (communism) led Effinger to ask idly, "Why is all this strange stuff happening?" Stirling and Turtledove explained that it was because in 1860, Lincoln was elected and later died in office; in 1880, Lincoln was elected and later died in office; in 1900, McKinley was elected and later died in office; in 1920, Harding was elected and later died in office; in 1940, Roosevelt was elected and later died in office; in 1960, Kennedy was elected and later died in office; but in 1980, Reagan was elected and shot, but did *not* die in office. Therefore, we are now in a low probability track. Flynn also mentioned Renfrew's model which says that power drops off by distance, and therefore nothing as big as the Soviet bloc could hold together much longer than it did. Flynn also talked about Edward R. Dewey and Edwin F. Dakin's *Cycles: the Science of Prediction*, which in 1947 predicted the economic cycles that in fact occurred between 1947 and now. (By the way, Dewey and Dakin predict the current downturn will end in 2006; hang in there. The book is still in print, if you're interested.)

Each talked briefly about his own forays into alternate history. Stirling mentioned that he had always wanted to write about slave-driven computers in Rome. (I wonder if he's read Sean McMullen's "Souls in the Great Machine" in *Universe 2*.) Turtledove said that his "Ready for the Fatherland" rapidly became more topical than he had expected. He emphasized that Europeans have longer historical memories than us, and said that the only reason the Serbs are the villains now is that they have more guns--if the Croats had more guns, they'd be just as bad.

The panel closed by recommending their favorite alternate history stories: Kingsley Amis's *The Alteration*, L. Sprague DeCamp's *Lest Darkness Fall*, Jack Finney's *The Woodrow Wilson Dime*, Murray Leinster's "Sideways in Time," Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee*, Keith Roberts's *Pavane*, and Bob Shaw's *The Two-Timers*.

(Someone said something about Turtledove's story in which the Persians defeat the Greeks, and Turtledove said that appealed only to crackpots. The limited groans from the audience told who had read the story--"Counting Potsherds"--and got the pun, and who had not.)

Panel: My Pet Hate--What Really Bothers Me About Some Books

Friday, 4 PM

Lisa Barnett, Algis Budrys, Jim Frenkel (moderator), Nancy Kress

As might be expected from the title, this panel ranged all over the map, from the minor to the major. First, I'll give the list that each panelist provided as their "opening statement," then I'll go on to the discussion that followed.

Barnett hates the use of gay characters as symbolic of decadence or a decadent society, the implication (or statement) that fantasy is inferior to science fiction, and the use of internally inconsistent magical systems. Kress hates science fiction or fantasy that is too easy and the same old stuff; in particular, she hates finishing a book and feeling, "I haven't been made to think or feel I haven't been challenged" She also hates child characters who conveniently nap or otherwise disappear when it is necessary for the plot ("When you wake up on the hillside and become queen, this is the day your fourteen-year-old daughter will want to know about contraception"), and

intelligent cats (she has two and claims they are the stupidest animals she has ever seen). Budrys hates most fantasy because it *is* too easy, made-up words for things that already exist on Earth, and stories that start with someone waking up in white room with no memory (Kress observed she had in fact written one of these, "Martin, on a Wednesday"), and (in response to Kress's comments on convenient child characters) any stories with children ("they're always unreadable"). He also said that he hates science fiction being considered a genre because it is a broader field than non-science-fiction since it can talk about anything. Frenkel hates little furry aliens for cuteness's sake alone, generic stories ("all bare plotlines sound stupid"), science and technology that doesn't make sense (i.e., there are no rules, or the rules are broken), and multiple suns or moons for no reason.

Sexual sins rated high on everyone's list. Kress hates sex scenes in which the woman reaches a climax after being touched exactly twice, and stories with Amazon warriors who behave with men like breasts, never worrying about pregnancy or periods or any of that stuff. Barnett hates stories in which women were sexless except in relation to men. Frenkel hates stories (usually by women, I suspect) in which all men are alike.

Kress said that overexplaining can be a real annoyance and cited the following from a manuscript she saw: "Grief hung on Dave like an albatross, which is a large bird from a poem." Frenkel said an extension of this was the explanatory lump (hundreds of words explaining how the society's current political system arose--imagine a novel set in the present which took time to explain the entire electoral college system as part of talking about an election).

>From the audience, Janice Eisen said that a couple of her pet hates were libertarian science fiction and science fiction that talks about how wonderful science fiction readers are (she gave Spider Robinson as an example of the latter). Another audience member said he hates when an author assumes taste is universal, and gave as an example an author who wanted to portray a character as unattractive. But when the author actually described the character, she turned out to be exactly the type this reader was attracted to! Another audience member said, "I hate people who expand novellas into novels," to which Kress responded that was precisely what she was doing with "Beggars in Spain." I would like to point out, however, that she is expanding it by writing what happened after the end of the novella (i.e., the novella forms an initial segment of the novel), while what people usually object to is the padding out of the novella story with more description and extra characters to reach novel length.

General peeves included running lights on spaceships, far futures in which men still come home from an office to a housewife, obligatory sex scenes, continuity errors, pointless series (I guess this is a meta-hate), share-cropping, paperbacks that fall apart in your hands (I haven't seen this very much since Lancer went out of business),

A mention of misleading covers led Nancy Kress to tell of her first collection. For some reason when it arrived, it had a cover with a very militaristic scene on it: spaceship, guns, etc. The blurb, however, talked about how Kress wrote "humanistic science fiction" (and was more accurate than the picture). When Kress asked her agent about this, the agent claimed that she (the agent) had seen only a 2"x2" slide of the picture and it looked different. "How could it have looked different? All it could have looked was smaller!" But it was too late, and Kress feels that people who wanted humanistic science fiction were turned off by the cover and people who wanted militaristic stuff were either turned off by the blurb or bought it, disliked it, and never bought more of her stuff. Panelists pointed out that collections usually do not get covers made to order, but get assigned one from the stock on hand. Budrys mentioned in this context the myth that collections don't sell, and pointed to his "Writers of the Future" books, which Kress and others immediately pointed out were *anthologies*, not collections.

One of the major things I learned from this panel is that Nancy Kress is a delight to listen to, and I will certainly try to get to any panel she's on (and recommend you do so also). I would also point out that her first novel, *Prince of Morning Bells*, seems at first a generic fantasy, but isn't. To paraphrase Kress, it's not too easy and it's not the same old stuff.

Panel: **Hugos for Electronic Fanac?**

Friday, 5 PM

Richard Gilliam, Saul Jaffe, Evelyn C. Leeper, Patrick Nielsen Hayden, Brad Templeton (moderator)

Well, this panel in some regards was a rehash of many previous panels and discussions. We did all agree from the outset, though, that writing was writing, whether done on paper or on phosphors, and so writing in electronic media should qualify one as a fan writer as much as writing on paper. (An amendment to this effect was passed at the business meeting.) In particular, I observed that I wrote 100,000 words last year, of which only 2,000 appeared in traditional paper fanzines, and I somehow doubted that my Hugo nomination was for those 2,000 words alone.

Then there was the usual business of explaining to various panel members (and the audience) how *SF-Lovers Digest* was *not* a bulletin board--it is composed of articles that are collected by topic, edited for spelling and grammar, and formatted for output, whereas a bulletin board is untreated data. Other electronic fanzines are even more obviously not just "cocktail party chat"--magazines such as *Quanta* are complete with artwork and fiction, and the only difference is that the editors send the subscribers the page layout electronically in Postscript format, and the subscribers print their own copies. This was dubbed a "U-Print-It" fanzine.

It was again pointed out that a reader can get access to Usenet or other electronic media for less than \$100, which is less than the cost of many foreign fanzines which *are* considered generally available. (I would also report that Nick Simicich volunteered to print up and mail out *SF-Lovers Digest* to anyone who pays for the printing and postage, thereby making it generally available. We even recorded this offer on videotape. Now all the committee has to do is decide what the circulation of it is!)

I noted out that if some electronic fanzine was not generally available, then it wouldn't get nominated. If an electronic fanzine got enough votes to get nominated, then it was certainly as available as the paper fanzines that got nominated as well. I have always found it amusing that the two arguments given against allowing electronic fanzines to be eligible are 1) they aren't generally available, and 2) they would get so many nominations they would squeeze out the paper fanzines. Excuse me?

Nielsen Hayden said that changing the WSFS Constitution was hard, because there was a lot of inertia built in, but on the whole this was probably a good thing.

I suggested the somewhat radical (though not original with me) idea that fan Hugos weren't quite "real" Hugos anyway, and maybe should be broken off, at which point the number of categories could be expanded. (No one really wants to increase the number of Hugos and lengthen the ceremony to longer than it is now. On the other hand, I said that eventually all of First Fandom will be dead--as will we all eventually--and so the Hugo Awards ceremony will be shorter by the amount of time those awards take now.) I can't help but feel that my Hugo nomination is not as important as one of the professional fiction category nominations, and wonder how those authors feel about having people like me having the same status as they (in some sense).

I also noted that the current attitude on the part of many fans against electronic fanzines would also rule out allowing fanzines on audio tape ("Fred's Fanzine for the Blind"), although Nielsen Hayden thought that any such entry would be immediately ruled eligible by the committee.

In short, progress seems to be being made. I think Nielsen Hayden started out by being somewhat opposed to Hugos for electronic fanzines but changed his mind when Saul and I explained what exactly we meant by electronic fanzines. This seems to be the major misunderstanding and perhaps I should start carrying around a copy of *Quanta* as an example for these discussions.

Dinner

Normally, dinner doesn't rate a paragraph in a con report, but this was unusual. There were nine of us who got together and decided to try the Ming Court, since it was 1) near and 2) recommended. As we started to leave the hotel room, I suggested that calling ahead to see how long the wait would be might be a good idea. Good thing we did. It was now 6:15 PM and they said they could seat us about 8:30 PM. Oh, well, thanks, but I don't think so. Well, they countered, when did you want to eat? Right now, I said, about 6:45 PM (allowing for walking time). "Let me check." After about a minute, she returned. We can seat you now, but only if you promise to be out by 8 PM, because we've promised that table for 8 PM. No problem! So we rushed off, arrived there, and were seated in a private banquet room at one of the tables. They obviously had a large party coming in at 8 PM, and the maitre d' reiterated that we *must* be out by 8 PM. We assured him that if he served us fast, we'd eat fast. So we had three waiters just for us, and in fact ordered and ate so quickly that we were done with the main course by 7:15 PM and had more time for dessert than we had taken for dinner. We were out by 7:40 PM, leaving them plenty of time to clear our table and re-set it. Strange, but definitely efficient!

Alternate Awards Ceremony

Friday, 9 PM

Guy Gavriel Kay (master of ceremonies)

It was good to see that MagiCon moved most of the non-Hugo awards out of the Hugo Awards ceremony (but see that section for my comments on the Gryphon), but they should have scheduled this Alternate Awards ceremony for a nicer room, or at least decorated it a bit. As it was, it was held in a basic meeting room that was used for panels all day (room 11C, which I will mention later), and lacked any air of festivity. (Even before this con report was finished, I was discussing this on the Net, and indications are that people have realized that this should be played up a bit in the future.)

Awards handed out:

- | Electric SF Award (from ClariNet Communications): Geoffrey Landis, "A Walk in the Sun"
- | Prometheus Hall of Fame Award (from the Libertarian Futurist Society): Ira Levin, *This Perfect Day*
- | Prometheus Award for Best Libertarian SF Novel (from the Libertarian Futurist Society): Larry Niven, Jerry Pournelle, and Michael Flynn for *Fallen Angels*
- | Golden Duck Award for Best Children's SF Book (from DucKon): Bruce Colville's *My Teacher Glows in the Dark*
- | Golden Duck Award for Best Children's SF Picture Book (from DucKon): Claire Ewart (illustrator), *Time Train*
- | Golden Duck Honorable Mention (from DucKon): Monica Hughes, *Invitation to the Game*
- | Sei-un for Best Foreign Novel in Translation: Charles Sheffield, *The McAndrew Chronicles*
- | Sei-un for Best Foreign Short Story or Novelette in Translation: John Varley, "Tango Charlie and Foxtrot Romeo"

The most humorous section was the Prometheus Awards. First Brad Linaweaver announced that Ira Levin had won the Hall of Fame Award for *This Perfect Day*, and then asked, "Does anyone know if he's still alive?" Levin has published other books recently and it was concluded he was probably still alive; I assume someone will locate him. Then Linaweaver announced the award for *Fallen Angels*, but of the three co-authors, only Flynn was present. Flynn accepted the award, saying, "I don't want to make a habit out of this" (referring to his win last year for *In the Country of the Blind*). As he finished, Pournelle, Niven, and their spouses arrived. Pournelle's first questions were, "What did we win? How do we split it?" He then proceeded to berate (in good fun) Linaweaver for directing them to 11C in the Clarion and impressing upon them how important it was that they be there--in Clarion 11C--on time. This became a running gag. When the representatives of Japanese fandom were

introduced for the Sei-un presentation, one of them was not present. Someone from the audience called out, "She's probably in Clarion 11C." The same was offered for all the winners who were not present, and Kay announced that photographs would be taken in Clarion 11C afterward.

Kay closed by noting that all these awards show the diversity and scope represented in the field of science fiction.

Other awards handed out at MagiCon, though not at this ceremony, included the Chesley Awards given by the Association of Science Fiction and Fantasy Artists:

- | Best Cover Illustration, Hardback Book: Michael Whelan, *The Summer Queen*
- | Best Cover Illustration, Paperback Book: David Cherry, *Sword and Sorceress VIII*
- | Best Cover Illustration, Magazine: David Mattingly, *Amazing*, September 1991
- | Best Interior Illustration: Bob Walters, "It Grows on You," *Weird Tales*, Summer 1991
- | Best Color Work, Unpublished: David Cherry, "Filea Mea"
- | Best Monochrome, Unpublished: Michael Whelan, "Study for All the Weyrns of Pern"
- | Best Three Dimensional Art: Clayburn Moore, "Celestial Jade"
- | Award for Artistic Achievement: James Gurney, body of work to date
- | Award for Contribution to ASFA (tie): Jan Sherrell Gephardt and Richard Kelly
- | Best Art Director: Betsy Wollheim and Sheila Gilbert, DAW Books

Also, the major Art Show awards were:

- | Popular Choice--Best Professional Artist: Michael Whelan (Honorable Mention: Thomas Canty)
- | Popular Choice--Best Amateur Artist: Deb Kosiba (Honorable Mention: Linda Michaels)
- | Guest of Honor's Choice: "Star Quake" by Steve Crisp
- | Chairman's Choice: "The Four Liberties" by Tom Kidd
- | Art Show Director's Choice: "Daughter of Conflict" by David A. Cherry
- | Judges' Award--Best of Show--Professional: "Subterraneans" by Michael Whelan
- | Judges' Award--Best of Show--Amateur: "Chameleon Confessions" by Lisa Snellings

@ Party

Friday, 10 PM

Brad Templeton (host)

The @ party was hosted by Brad Templeton and ClariNet Communications. This meant there were no worries about collecting for refreshments, finding someone to volunteer a room, etc. It was conveniently located (being just down the hall from my room, so I could pop out to see if Mark was back in the room yet, then pop back for a while without a major time investment). I don't know what the total attendance was; it seems to be at least as much as last year, though not as crowded because of the larger room. I didn't see as many familiar faces (names), though. ClariNet was using the room to promote their "Library of Tomorrow" electronic library as well, so that may account for the new (to me) folks. There was a laptop for signing in, but someone managed to delete a lot of the names by mistake at one point, so I don't know if anyone knows the actual attendance. The free buttons were popular.

Panel: If This Goes On...

Saturday, 11 AM

Michael F. Flynn, Jack C. Haldeman II, Frederik Pohl, Michael Swanwick

(Pat Cadigan was supposed to be the moderator but didn't make it; I'm not sure who, if anyone,

did moderate.)

When I arrived, Haldeman was talking about working with medical technology and how it has changed a lot over the past few years. He's currently working on a medical technology science fiction story set in 2040 and says it is very difficult to predict what things will be like then.

Swanwick talked about his trip to the convention. He got on an airplane which had a telephone at every seat from which you could call anywhere in the country; arrived at an airport with slide walks and monorails; used a bathroom that had infrared sensors to open and close doors, flush toilets, and turn on faucets; was given an electronic key by the desk clerk; and was told that he could pick up his voice mail on channel 99. And, he said, the clerk didn't explain what was meant by this--he assumed Haldeman would understand. To this Flynn remarked, "If this were a science fiction story, the clerk *would* have explained."

Flynn said that he represented the voice of reason speaking against the theory that change keeps accelerating: "Between 1870 and 1920, the daily lives of citizens in cities in the Western World changed more than any period before--or since." There was considerable debate on this, in part because the panelists couldn't agree on which citizens' lives they were measuring. Swanwick pointed to the computer, modem, fax, and satellite dish as changing his life (and many others) enormously. For example, he says that his record between submission of a story and its acceptance is now three-and-a-half minutes, where ten years ago it would have been weeks. But he says he also finds himself expecting this sort of response for everything. He recently mailed a copy of an article to Jane Yolen and a half hour after sealing, addressing, and stamping the envelope, he found himself wondering where her answer was--even though he hadn't mailed the letter yet! But other panelists focused more on the people who were not as touched by the communications revolution.

Pohl, for one, said he was completely out of sympathy with the computer network movement, though he didn't actually explain why. He did talk about the World Future Society and others who *work* at predicting the future, and who say, "We don't know it [the future] and we don't want to know it." Pohl also gave Pohl's Law: "The more accurate and complete a forecast is, the less useful it is." Why? Because if someone can predict accurately and precisely that X will happen, then there is nothing we can do to change that. This gets into a whole philosophical discussion of free will versus determinism which would probably be too long and complex for this convention report. Suffice it to say that while knowing there will be a frost on October 10 of this year won't change that there will be a frost, it would allow farmers to plan accordingly, so accurate and precise predictions can have useful secondary effects.

As far as predictions go, Flynn (I believe) claimed that the Department of Energy has run a variety of scenarios and concluded that in all of them our society will crash and burn--the only question is how soon. But he says the fallacy in them is that they have programmed into their scenarios that science is a drain on energy resources, and he and many others feel that this is not the case. He says the problem is our belief that "progress is our most important product," that we must be constantly increasing production, increasing personal possessions, and so forth. He also referred again to Dewey and Dakin (see his Friday "Alternate History Stories" panel for details).

On the whole, Pohl is a pessimist (and says so). One reason for this, he claims, is that we are always working on the cure for something such that by the time we have the cure, it's too late. Research cutbacks caused by the economic downturn have exacerbated this as well.

The panel then responded to the question: "Can we save our country from the automobile without bulldozing the suburbs?" Pohl rejoined, "No, you've got the right idea--bulldoze the suburbs." (As you can probably tell by this point, the panel tended to drift from the actual topic to how to fix things that *were* going on.) Pohl pointed out that in regard to the "planned

communities" that many audience members seemed to be proposing, "The history of planned communities is not promising." (One need only look at the problems in Starett City in New York to see that.) On the other hand, the recent devastation in South Florida might lead to a move back to the cities, where homes are available, and the suburbs have already been bulldozed by Nature. As far as true arcologies go, though, some major issues remain: Who knows how to build them? Who can pay for them? Who wants to live in them? The biosphere in Arizona is a special (and very expensive) case.

Asked what current or past hot issues were dying out, the panelists felt abortion would cease to be a major issue, because RU-486 would become generally available (either legally or illegally). Threats to personal freedom would also cease being a major issue, not because they would go away, but because we would get used to them, and the wide-spread acceptance of monitoring cameras was given as a prime example. (Read Charles Oberndorf's *Sheltered Lives* for some extrapolation and commentary on the video monitor phenomenon.)

Somewhere along the line Haldeman told of an experiment which involved following paranoids around to see if their paranoia was justified, i.e., was someone really following them? The conclusion? No. (Think about it.)

As an example of the failure of science fiction to predict major events, I would point out that no one predicted anything like AIDS (as far as I know--if there was such a prediction or speculation, I'm sure someone will point it out to me). And Robert Lucky, head of research at Bell Labs, was quoted in a recent issue of *Analog* as saying that we are terrible at predicting or directing change: the Picturephone and something else (I forget what) were pushed by the industry but failed, while cellular phones and facsimile machines were big successes that were surprises to the industry, but gained enormous grass-roots support. And of course, Flynn cited the now-famous prediction from 1900 that based on the then-current trends, and projecting for expected population growth, New York would be buried under six feet of horse manure by the year 2000 (or whenever).

Panel: Does SF Prepare People for Change?

Saturday, 1 PM

Grant Carrington, Michael Kandel, James Morrow (moderator), Mike Resnick, Kristine Kathryn Rusch

This panel tied in well with the preceding one ("If This Goes On..."). For example, the Robert Lucky quote above about the predictability of change is equally applicable to our attempts to deal with it.

My initial answer to the question posed by *this* panel was, "No. If it did, there wouldn't be the fight over electronic fanzine eligibility that there is." Morrow's initial answer was yes; as he said, "I'm prepared to deal with change. I know technology. I knew to turn the microphone on." Carrington hedged, "It depends on the person." Kandel admitted, "I'm not really prepared for the present," and went on to describe a \$3.4 million lawsuit over the dismissal of a high school girl from the cheerleading squad. Rusch felt that "science fiction explores the results of change rather than preparing us for change." But Resnick, in seeming contradiction to this, claimed that "science fiction is first to present technology, but last to present the moral and ethical issues about it."

A thought which had occurred to me, and which was voiced by Kandel, was that it is perhaps not so much that science fiction prepares people for change as that the people who are prepared for change read science fiction. Reading science fiction to prepare oneself for change strikes me as similar to Tanith Lee's rationale for reading horror stories because they give you practice

being frightened.

As evidence of science fictions fans' inflexibility, Dozois and Resnick said, "If you want to make a lot of science fiction fans mad, portray the Third World as it really is." (This has resonances in some of S. M. Stirling's comments in the "Build an Alternate History" panel below.) Fandom is almost entirely white and middle-class. (Looking around the room for this panel certainly seemed to bear that thesis out.)

Regarding why change is often portrayed negatively, Resnick said, "Every writer has at most one utopia he can create," so most futures are dystopias. Of course, a writer could set several stories in the same utopian future, or create some "almost-utopias," but you get the point: there can be only one "best of all possible worlds."

Morrow pointed to a current story, John Kessel's "Buffalo," as being a wonderful example of the characters in the story missing the direction of change entirely. And there is a certain irony to this, in that H. G. Wells (a character in "Buffalo") managed to predict air wars and the atom bomb, but couldn't see most of the direction of social change. (This is also captured rather effectively in the film *Time After Time*, in which Wells has a time machine and uses it to come to modern-day San Francisco to chase Jack the Ripper.)

I would note that perhaps one reason that alternate histories are so popular is that they deal with change (in a very specific manner). When fans pick holes in them, it's their way of trying to understand what change means and how it works. Alternate histories were in fact mentioned in passing here--at least I have a note referring to someone talking about a Denny's full of truck drivers all reading Morrow's *Only Begotten Daughter*, and if that's not alternate history, I don't know what is!

Just as we reached this point, Program Ops sent someone in to hold up a sign to the panelists saying, "STOP!" As one of them said, "I guess they want us to stop change."

Kaffeeklatsch: **Pat Cadigan**

Saturday, 2 PM

I had never been to a kaffeeklatsch before, but since I think Pat Cadigan's work is among that which is just about the best thing since movable type, I decided I had to sign up for this. Luckily for me, there were people there more willing to ask questions and draw her out (not that she's incredibly shy or anything!), because I wasn't quite sure how these things work.

Cadigan talked about how she worked for Hallmark for ten years and therefore knew "corporate hardcases"; that's why she can draw them accurately in her work. Hallmark was interesting, she said, because it had a very schizophrenic nature. To the outside world, it had to appear as a very conservative, family-oriented ("family values," I suppose) company, while in actuality it had a very high percentage of gay employees, because of what she felt was an accepting environment. Even now, she remains in Kansas City (she was born in Fitchburg, Massachusetts), and says that Kansas City has one of the country's largest gay pride parades.

Her literary influences seem to have been authors with what she termed "original voices." Among these were Cordwainer Smith ("Cordwainer Smith is God") and Tom Reamy, whose "Pottifee, Petey, and Me" still awaits the publication of *The Last Dangerous Visions*. She said she had seen the manuscript and gave us a brief outline of the plot. We asked about whether the rights hadn't reverted to his estate by now, but Cadigan wasn't sure. Other "original voices" she listed were James Tiptree, Jr., and Howard Waldrop.

In response to another question, she said that her work had first appeared in *New Dimensions 11*

and now, "ten years later, I'm an instant success."

In regard to what she writes about, Cadigan said that in a workshop she learned that there were first-order stories (write about building an invention, e.g., the automobile), second-order stories (write about learning to cope with the invention, e.g., build some roads), and third-order stories (write about further effects, e.g., suburbs). She decided she wanted to write third-order stories, because she felt those were the best, and wrote *Synners* to be primarily a third-order story with some first-order elements.

Alas, I had to leave this somewhat early in order to make it back to the Convention Center in time for the next item.

Preview: **Bram Stoker's *Dracula***

Saturday, 3 PM

Francis Ford Coppola, Roman Coppola

There was apparently some confusion over this item. A friend said that she didn't realize that Coppola was going to talk for an hour before showing the movie. Huh? Eventually I realized that she thought this was a sneak preview of the entire film *Dracula*, rather than a preview in the sense of overview. "Preview" is one of those overloaded words in English, and future committees should be sure to clarify which meaning they are using. This was particularly confusing at MagiCon, since George R. R. Martin *did* have a sneak preview of *Doors*, also labeled a "preview."

I was glad I had a press ribbon, because by the time I arrived the only seats left were in the press section. There had been some talk about Coppola holding a separate press conference, but that didn't happen. The hour started with a ten-minute film on the making of *Dracula*, then Coppola talked for a while, and finally the audience got to ask some questions.

The main information we got, and the reason Roman Coppola was there, was that the special effects were being done using only techniques that were available in 1897, when the book was written. So there would be no computer morphing or anything like that; all the effects were done using camera tricks or stage magic. Roman Coppola was the second unit director and the person in charge of all these effects, and talked a little bit about them. For example, many of the techniques he used were taken from a 1897 book on illusion that Roman had discovered when he was in film school.

Coppola (Francis Ford) began by talking about his early association with *Dracula*, when as a camp counselor he used to read the book to his charges at camp to get them to sleep early so he could visit his girlfriend across the lake. (Whether this worked because the boys didn't argue about going to bed because they were eager for the story, or because it was so boring it put them right to sleep, he didn't say.) Coppola's favorite *Dracula* is John Carradine from *House of Dracula*. He says his version of *Dracula* will be the most accurate yet, with the closest version he's seen up to now being Murnau's *Nosferatu*. When he was asked about the BBC version *Count Dracula* (starring Louis Jourdan), which most people list as the most accurate, Coppola admitted he hadn't seen it. While I can understand his not wanting to be overly influenced by previous versions of the story, I would think that he should have watched what is generally accepted as the best version.

At least Coppola was fairly knowledgeable about *Dracula*, though the script seems to take great liberties, giving *Dracula* a lost love and having other strange non-canonical touches. Coppola commented that it was curious that the two great classics of the horror film (*Frankenstein* and *Dracula*) were both based on Byron, though the latter was one step removed by being based on

John Polidori's vampire, who was based on Lord Byron. (Both *The Vampyre* and *Frankenstein* came out of a bet made by Polidori, Byron, and Mary Shelley one night in Switzerland during a summer spent there with Percy Bysshe Shelley.)

Still, Coppola claims James V. West's script is accurate to the book. The film was shot entirely on a sound stage, in 69 days, with a budget of \$40 million. Even with that budget, the film had to be carefully planned to minimize the number of sets needed. Coppola says one reason films cost so much is that every department not only wants to do 100% of the movie--they want to overproduce "just to be sure." So, for example, the costume department will decide that it must have the absolute ultimate in costumes, and in addition, will want to make some extra costumes, just in case they're needed. This can run the cost up very fast. The advance planning necessary to keep the costs down helps, but Coppola admits that one side effect of all that planning is that you get sick of the movie faster than if you just dived in.

Gary Oldman (of *Sid and Nancy*, *Prick Up Your Ears*, and *JFK*) was chosen for the title role as being the actor that Coppola felt had both the range necessary to play Dracula in all his forms and at all his ages, and the ability to show the passion and love that Dracula feels. The score is performed by a symphony orchestra rather than a smaller group or a synthesizer. Coppola had wanted to commission a classical Polish composer (Poland being where most of the classical composers are these days), but discovered that would take too long. So instead, he hired Wojciech Kilar, who did a lot of the music for Andrzej Wajda's films.

During the question-and-answer session, someone asked Coppola what his favorite science fiction was. He said he liked *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, but also mentioned *Childhood's End*--not a movie, but a book. He must be one of the few directors in Hollywood who reads science fiction (or has read it). In general, he seemed very enthusiastic about his work in general and this film in particular--more like a fan than a famous director.

Someone asked him about his "cinemobile" (named the Silverfish) and whether it was true that he spent all his time in that rather than on the set itself. Coppola said that having a portable lab/viewing room/etc. made his work easier but that he always directed from right next to the camera, and did not hide out in the Silverfish.

In response to a question about rumors that the film would be very violent or erotic, Coppola said that these must have been started by someone who saw all the footage that was shot. Coppola said they never intended to use *all* the footage, though I suspect the film will have a R rating rather than a PG-13.

Coppola advised people trying to break into Hollywood as writers not to write screenplays, but instead to write short stories or one-act plays.

Among upcoming projects, Coppola mentioned that Columbia Pictures is trying to get the rights for *Dr. Strange* for Roman to direct.

Asked to sum up the message of the film, Coppola said, "Love is stronger than evil; love is stronger than death."

Panel: **Build an Alternate History**

Saturday, 5 PM

Barbara Hambly, Cortney Skinner (moderator), S. M. Stirling, Harry Turtledove

Judith Tarr was supposed to be on this panel, but couldn't make it. However, Harry Turtledove credited her *in absentia* with the inspiration for his latest book, *The Guns of the South*

(previously known as *The Long Drum Roll*). It seems that he was talking to Judith about one of her books and she bemoaned the fact that the cover on it was "as anachronistic as Robert E. Lee holding an Uzi." Well, Turtledove thought about this and decided that Uzis were not the right weapon, but what about if Lee had an AK-47? What if Lee had a *lot* of AK-47s? And who would give Lee a lot of AK-47s? Time traveling Afrikaaners, of course. And so *The Guns of the South* was born.

The question of how to choose a change point was raised. Stirling claims the trick is to avoid the really over-used one. But he claims lots have been done with the Armada as the critical point; I can locate only three: John Brunner's *Times Without Number*, Phyllis Eisenstein's *Shadow of Earth*, and Keith Roberts's *Pavane*.

As the panelists agreed, catching the author in an error in his or her alternate history is part of the game. (I'm glad they do it too; it makes me feel a little less guilty about pointing them out when I find them. And they also said they love it when history experts compliment them on the good job they did.) And they don't worry about making the same mistake more than once--fans *will* write them to tell them. Turtledove says that a common mistake is to slip up on the language. For example, a United States without a major European immigration in the early 1900s would not speak a language full of Yiddishisms. On the flip side, making the language accurate to its period or its world will often alienate the readers and possibly cause censorship problems. In a story set in a world in which slavery continues to exist, the word "n----" would more than likely still be in common use. But using it in a story can cause problems (ask Mark Twain). The panelists agreed that the best solution was to use it, but only in dialogue.

This led to what is the most useful (and perhaps most controversial) idea to emerge from this panel. To paraphrase Resnick and Dozois from the "Does SF Prepare People for Change" panel (above): "If you want to make a lot of science fiction fans mad, portray the people of a different era as they really were." When Stirling first introduced himself, he said, "I'm S. M. Stirling, or as I'm often called, that fascist bastard." This is no doubt due to his Drakka alternate history trilogy (*Marching Through Georgia*, *Under the Yoke*, and *The Stone Dogs*), in which Tories driven out of the United States upon its independence colonize South Africa and eventually begin to conquer the world. As someone on the Net has described it, the Drakka "have rejected Christian/Bourgeois morality, and follow a philosophy close aligned with Nietzsche and Gorbineau. The Drakka give a whole new meaning to the dictum 'Die Macht ist Das Recht.' The Drakka are both repellent and attractive. They are the most ecologically sound resource developers on the planet, but they treat the people they conquer like excrement." Now, Stirling has stated that the Drakka are the villains, but apparently a lot of readers haven't gotten the message that he thinks so, so they think Stirling believes what the Drakka believe, and hence describe him as a "fascist bastard." But what he has done is portray the Drakka with the mind-set he thinks *they* would have. His claim is that people of different eras thought differently than we do, and that drawing them accurately--especially if one of them is your "hero"--either leads your audience to think *you* think that way, or alienates them by painting a picture of people they can't identify with. (I should note that while this sounds plausible, and Resnick has run into the same problem with the protagonist of his Kirinyaga stories, Connie Willis in a recent *Locus* interview says that we often have this belief that people of different eras felt differently about things than we do and that, for example, the death of a child in an era where childhood deaths were more common did not affect people as much. She says her research found this belief to be wrong, and she wrote *Doomsday Book* in part to counter it. So everyone has to decide for her or himself.)

Another problem with attempts at accuracy is that what we think of as "common knowledge" is often wrong. For example: George Washington and the cherry tree. Now at this point, most readers know this is a fictional story, but there are certainly other cases in which if you tell the truth, readers will think you got it wrong, and vice versa.

Stirling also said that while the cover for *Marching Through Georgia* was accurate, the covers for *Under the Yoke* and *The Stone Dogs* were not, because the publisher didn't want to put swastikas on the cover. That struck several people as strange, since swastikas on a cover seem to sell books rather than inhibit sales. Len Deighton's *SS-GB* did quite well with a swastika, and Robert Harris's *Fatherland* has nothing *but* a swastika on the cover.

Hambly described this as the "obsessive detail panel," which led an audience member to ask about research. While a lot of research is done in major university libraries and via electronic networks, most of the panelists had done some first-hand research as well, not in the sense of going back to 1860 of course, but in the sense of wearing clothing of that period; trying to cook, wash, and live in the manner of that period for some length of time; fired weapons of that period; and so on. (What they discovered was that living in these historical periods is not fun, and they didn't even have to cope with disease, hygiene problems, and so on.) And if you're writing about the Civil War or World War II, there's no lack of documentation. In fact, these eras were described as "over-documented." Turtledove said that he asked someone for an estimate of how many men were in a particular regiment and got back a complete roster of who was in it, where they were from, their family histories, etc., etc. And what he discovered he probably can't even use because no one would believe it. For example, there was at least one woman in the regiment. But if you put a woman in a Civil War regiment in a novel, everyone will scream that you're doing it from political correctness rather than accuracy. (In the alternate Civil War panel, it was noted that the Confederate Army actually had a couple of black regiments. This, too, would not be accepted in a novel.)

Turtledove talked about his upcoming book, *In the Balance*, in which World War II is rolling along, it's May 1942, and then the aliens land. He describes it as "*Footfall* meets *Winds of War*." (Who knows--that could be the blurb. Anything is possible. Some bookstores are putting the promotional flyer for *The Guns of the South* in the history section. Maybe they think Lee *did* have AK-47s!)

Skinner, on the other hand, is working on a project a la "Vinland the Dream" (by Kim Stanley Robinson)--an artifact of a Gobi Desert dinosaur expedition (that never existed in our world). Skinner is an artist, and the project consists of authentic-looking documents, newspaper clippings, telegrams, steamship tickets, and so on, all carefully faked to look authentic. (If you've read "Vinland the Dream" you know what I'm talking about.) I commented that the only problem was that a few hundred years in the future someone might find this project and think the expedition it documented really did happen!

Hugo Awards

Saturday, 8:30 PM

First the awards:

- i Novel: Lois McMaster Bujold, *Barrayer* (Baen)
- i Novella: Nancy Kress, "Beggars in Spain," IASFM, April 1991
- i Novelette: Isaac Asimov, "Gold," *Analog*, September 1991
- i Short Story: Geoffrey A. Landis, "A Walk in the Sun," IASFM, October 1991
- i Non-Fiction Book: Charles Addams, *The World of Charles Addams*
- i Original Artwork: Michael Whelan, cover of *The Summer Queen*
- i Dramatic Presentation: *Terminator 2* (Carolco)
- i Professional Editor: Gardner Dozois
- i Professional Artist: Michael Whelan
- i Fanzine: Mimosas, Dick and Nicki Lynch
- i Semiprozine: Locus, Charles Brown
- i Fan Writer: Dave Langford
- i Fan Artist: Brad Foster

- i John W. Campbell Award: Ted Chiang
- i First Fandom Award: Arthur Widner, Jr., Nelson Bond, Art Saha, and J. Harvey Haggert
- i Big Heart Award: Samantha Jeude

(The last three are not Hugos.)

Now the commentary:

What a fuck-up!

I am not one to use obscenity lightly in a con report, so when I say, "What a fuck-up!" please understand I am talking about *major* problems.

"Like what?" you ask.

Like allowing Andre Norton to award the Gryphon Award at the Hugo Awards ceremony.

Like the master of ceremonies having no idea that he was supposed to match his reading of the nominees to slides being projected, which he couldn't see very well from the podium anyway.

Like the master of ceremonies not knowing what order to do the awards in, and almost skipping one and repeating another.

Like having the slides kludged together by the committee so that, for example, some artists had a slide of their work and others just one of their signatures from the Hugo Nominee information form. (And my work was represented by a piece from the *MT VOID*, which is not known for its layout or design; I would have preferred to send them a copy of one from *The Reading Edge*, which would have looked more like the other nominees. But compared to all the other problems, the importance of this is lower than whale shit, as my old supervisor used to say.)

Like announcing the wrong nominee as the winner.

Yes, that's right, folks: in the fanzine category, Spider Robinson announced that the winner was *Lan's Lantern* edited by George Laskowski ("Lan"). As Lan approached the podium, the slide announcing the winner flashed up on the screen--except that it said "*Mimosa*: Dick and Nicki Lynch." At that point, I don't think either Lan or Robinson could see the slide, but the person holding the award saw that it was engraved to *Mimosa*, and Lan saw that when he took it, so Lan thought fast, stepped up to the podium, said he had no prepared speech, said "Thank you," and walked backstage. This seemed odd to people who knew Lan--he had speeches both times previous that he had won, and that he wouldn't have at least thanked Maia seemed unlikely. Therefore we suspected that the slide may have been right, and sure enough, after the next award, Lan came back out with the Hugo and Robinson announced there had been an error and *Mimosa* was the winner. Could Dick and Nicki Lynch come up to the podium to receive their award? Well, Dick could, but Nicki had gone to the women's room and was unavailable. After another award or two, they announced a break to change the slide tray (actually I was told later it was so that the staff could frantically open all the envelopes to make sure the cards inside were correct), and the audience called for Nicki then, so she did finally get her moment of triumph.

How did this happen? Well, for reasons known only to the committee, they decided that the winner's names should be nicely calligraphed on fancy cards (in spite of the fact that only the master of ceremonies would see the cards). But the advance time for the cards was such that they had to have a card made up for each nominee--they had no way of knowing then who the winners would be. How the wrong card actually got in will remain a matter of speculation for years to come.

People observed that it was at least some consolation that the "wrong winner" had won a couple of Hugos already; having this happen in the other direction would have been much worse. And many people observed that had this happened in the semi-prozine category, it would have been quite entertaining no matter which direction it happened in. (Well, perhaps not to Charlie Brown and Andy Porter.) I observed to Lan later than he now could put "2.0000095-time Hugo winner" on his colophon, giving him the edge over those people who had won only precisely two times. And Lan received universal acclamation for being a real "class act" in his genuine enthusiasm and happiness in passing the award on to the winners. Many of us feel that ConFrancisco should present him with a special award for "grace under pressure." (Laurie Mann thinks it should be named the "Coonskin Cap Award" after his trademark hat.) The most popular button of the following day among the nominees seemed to be "For all I know, I might have won a Hugo," made up by Brad Templeton of ClariNet. He also made one for Nancy Kress that said, "I lost the Hugo to Nancy Kress." And Connie Willis went around the next day talking about how she managed to lose bigger than any previous Hugo nominee.

The Gryphon Award was first given out at Noreascon 3 at the Hugo Awards ceremony there, with the excuse that Norton was a Guest of Honor, and she had apparently made a fuss when this award was originally scheduled to be presented at one of her panels or talks. Confiction and Chicon V moved it to the Alternate Awards ceremony, but MagiCon again found itself under pressure by Norton--the claim was she had given a lot of time and money to the convention, to which Nick Simicich responded, "How much do I have to pay to get to present my award for white male writers at the Hugo ceremonies?" (No answer was forthcoming.) The Gryphon Award is for the "Best Unpublished Fantasy Manuscript by a Woman" (who has not had more than one piece published). Norton's rationale for this was that "the women" don't win as many awards, so this is needed. At Noreascon, C. J. Cherryh won the award for Best Novel and Connie Willis on for Best Novella. This year, Lois McMaster Bujold won for Best Novel and Nancy Kress for Best Novella. In fact, this year more than half the fiction nominees were women. So what on earth is this ridiculous award doing at the Hugo Award ceremony?! If the Libertarians and the Japanese and everyone else are presenting their awards at the Alternate Award ceremony, then Andre Norton should be also.

Samanda Jeude is one of the founders of Electrical Eggs.

The Hugo was designed by Phil Tortorici and includes a piece of the gantry from Launch Complex 26 at Cape Canaveral, from which Explorer 1 had been launched. Everyone agreed it was one of the best Hugo designs they had seen.

The Hugo Awards ceremony was preceded by a fifteen-minute slide show retrospective of fifty years of Worldcons. The slide show included pictures of program books, covers of Hugo-winning novels, photos of the guests of honor, and other remembrances and was produced by Scott Robinson and Sally Martin. Unlike the ceremony itself, the slide show was universally well-received. Well done! (One author commented that what he liked about it the best was that people were applauding the *books!*)

As far as my opinions on the awards, I have to say there is no justice, or at least only partial justice. "Gold" clearly won because it was Asimov's final story--or people thought it was, though now I see there are one or two more still in the pipeline for the magazines. It was the weakest in its category; Pat Cadigan's "Dispatches from the Revolution" absolutely blew it away in quality, but she was up against the sympathy vote. Oh, well, maybe her "No Prisoners" will take the Hugo next year (hint, hint). "A Walk in the Sun" seemed to win more because it was the only real hard science fiction short story than because of any great merit on its part. Connie Willis should have won at least one Hugo, given her strong placement in the nominations, and this would have been the category I would have chosen it in (for "In the Late Cretaceous"), because I also thought Nancy Kress's Hugo for "Beggars in Spain" was right on the money. (I must admit this was a strong year for short fiction.) And *Barrayar* in the novel

category is quite reasonable. As far as my opinions on the recipients, I have to say that Michael Whelan was as usual the most gracious--when he finished talking about how good all the other nominees were, you almost felt as if they had all won. Charlie Brown, on the other hand, was even more pompous than previously. He said that when he heard that he was nominated this year, he started to worry, but that turned out to be unnecessary. For those of us who are nominated and know that we have no chance of winning, the idea of worrying that one might not win strikes us as really egotistical.

Your mileage may vary.

Party: **Hugo Nominees**

Saturday, 10:30 PM

ConFrancisco (sponsor)

The Hugo Nominees Party (it used to be the Hugo Losers Party, but they started letting the winners in as well) was fairly crowded and very hot. Crowded in part because there were more nominees this year (because of ties, although the number of multiple nominees may have cancelled this out), and in part because it is also open to all SFWA members as well. Hot because the ventilation and air conditioning was not perfect and also because I was wearing a tuxedo--in shorts and a T-shirt I might have been more comfortable. The Hugo nomination remembrances this year were pads of paper with a cover that says "Hugo Nominee 1992." I suppose one shouldn't look a gift horse in the mouth, but this gift lacks the permanence of the previous one, being the sort of note-pad one rips pages out of as one uses them. I do agree, though, that something to write or draw on is eminently suitable for a bunch of writers and artists. (And I saved my plastic champagne glass as a more permanent reminder. Which reminds me: kudos to the ConFrancisco folks for having non-alcoholic champagne as well as alcoholic--I drink the latter, but there are many who don't and they appreciate the thoughtfulness.)

I also got to see the fanzine Hugo--it definitely said *Mimosa*.

Oh, by the way, to whomever from the ConFrancisco committee I was discussing Anne McCaffrey's *Cooking Out of This World* with: I saw a reprint of it Monday in the dealers room from Wildside Press for \$10 in trade paperback and \$40 in hardback.

Panel: When Is Humor NOT Funny?

Sunday, 12 noon

Esther Friesner, Tappan King (moderator), Terry Pratchett, Bradley Strickland, Connie Willis

Willis said she wanted to start by saying that some recent non-funny things in her life were going to Hugo Awards ceremony and losing bigger than anyone else ever did, or for that matter going to the Hugo Awards ceremony at all.

The main question the panel addressed, though, was whether there are things that shouldn't be written about humorously. A line of Byron was quoted by someone: "And if I laugh at any thing, it is that I not weep." This would seem to indicate the feeling that even (perhaps especially) serious topics are allowable. While death is certainly fair game (Friesner recommended *The Wrong Box* as a very funny film about people dying in strange ways), she said that she couldn't see writing humorously about abuse. Other panelists agreed, but Pratchett elaborated by saying that he could tell abuse jokes and the audience would laugh, but we wouldn't be happy that we had laughed. Humor that leaves the audience feeling unhappy or

guilty is not successful humor. Gross humor, he said, falls somewhere in the middle and gave the following example: What is the difference between an oral and a rectal thermometer? The taste. As he pointed out, the audience laughed, but they felt guilty about laughing.

All this led up to Willis's observation that "anything *can* be funny, but there are definite advantages to picking something funny in the first place." Willis said that she has the problem that because she writes such a high percentage of humorous stories, she often finds readers of her serious works expect them to be funny as well. For example, she said one fan told her he liked "The Last of the Winnebagos" but that it just wasn't as funny as some of her other stuff. (Lord knows what he'll make of *Doomsday Book*!)

Strickland said that self-deprecating humor almost always works, in part because it is not laughing *at* the person being hurt. And others proposed that humor is a defense mechanism, and tries to give people a sense of perspective.

As far as the outer fringes of allowability, Pratchett claimed that in fifty years, it would be considered acceptable to have a sitcom set in a death camp. (He also said that he had considered predicting a "soap" instead of a sitcom, but thought that the pun would be in poor taste. This got a laugh of sorts from the audience, but it was the same sort of laugh that the thermometer joke got.) Even now, he said, there is 'Allo, 'Allo, set in a Nazi-occupied territory. But Jerry Lewis's *The Day the Clown Cried* (set in a death camp) is having difficulty getting a release. (I asked Pratchett later, and he had not heard of Lina Wertmuller's 1976 *Seven Beauties*, a semi-comedy set in a death camp.)

Pratchett may be right. After all, Mel Brooks has made fun of the Inquisition, and Pratchett has a section in one of his books set in a torture chamber, where he looks at it as just another workplace: there is a coffee machine in the corner, a bulletin board announcing births and retirements, and so on. Pratchett describes this as illustrating the "banality of evil" that became so important a philosophical topic after World War II.

Pratchett also wrote about a convention of serial killers, complete with panels, films, parties, etc. Strickland commented, "At that convention of serial killers, I bet they were real careful to give their Hugos to the right people."

As far as humorous looks at reality, Friesner recommended *The Cartoon History of the Universe* and *The Cartoon History of America*. And apropos of nothing, she mentioned that her daughter's hamster bit her-- and then the hamster died.

Willis closed with a story of how she went to a funeral home to arrange for a funeral for her grandmother (I think) and the funeral director asked her what sort of furniture her grandmother had, so that he could help choose a casket that fit in with that. This struck Willis as so bizarre that it was all she could do to keep from laughing out loud, which she felt would be considered inappropriate behavior.

Panel: **Seven Deadly Sins of SF--Invent Your Own**

Sunday, 1 PM

Roger MacBride Allen (moderator), Pat Cadigan, Eileen Gunn, Maureen F. McHugh, Connie Willis

This turned out to be the silly panel--or at least started that way. Datlow showed a copy of her anthology *Alien Sex* and then said, "If anyone wants it, they can come up to me or Pat [Cadigan] after the panel." Willis again mentioned losing big at the Hugo Awards ceremony. Cadigan, on the other hand, described herself as "Connie Willis Lite," because she had lost two-

thirds fewer Hugos that night before.

But eventually the panel turned to the topic at hand, and it was surprising how their rambling comments, when organized, tend to match the traditional "Seven Deadly Sins."

For example, under the category of sloth would fall the sin of leaving boring stuff boring. The panelists all said, "If it's boring, rewrite it."

Gluttony? Here is the same sin mentioned in the "Alternate History Stories" panel: putting all your research in the story. Also attacked were long elvish names with no vowels and lots of apostrophes, and just about every tavern scene found in a fantasy series. (One panelist claimed all these, and the "Star Wars" cantina sequence for that matter, are patterned after a sequence in Samuel R. Delany's *Jewels of Aptor*.)

Slander? People said wasting your time on GEnie or other electronic bulletin boards trading gossip will quickly undermine your writing.

Greed? In science fiction, it's called sequelitis.

Envy? The panelists decried "band-waggoning," by which I assume they meant writing about something just because it's a hot topic. An example not in the science fiction field would be the enormous proliferation of high-tech thrillers after Tom Clancy hit it big with *The Hunt for Red October*.

Pride? What about characters who read science fiction and can cope better with whatever is going on because of it (the main flaw of Harry Turtledove's *Earthgrip*, as I recall). McHugh said that her experiences reading science fiction did not prepare her for living in China for a year (nor vice versa, since she apparently caused a bus accident when a bus driver who had never seen a Westerner before got distracted watching her walk down the street and ran into a car).

As far as lust, there were a lot of jokes about Cadigan, some convention-goer clad only in a loincloth, and alien sex. There was also the sin of having sex acts described in such a way as to make the reader a voyeur rather than a participant.

Anger was not directly touched on, but undoubtedly with a little effort one could come up with a sin for that. (How about stories written only to preach the author's point of view?)

One major sin the panelists mentioned was underpopulating your stories. You need characters your protagonists can talk to, argue with, do things with, and so on. Raymond Chandler once said, "Never have explication in a story except under heat." Never have your characters thinking about something they could be talking to someone about. Never tell when you can show. (On the other hand, don't have scenes with two minor characters talking where the only purpose is to inform the reader of something important.) And try to have more than one thing going on in a scene. (And, by the way, stories should have protagonists, not heroes, and villains should not be undefeatable, especially if your protagonist is going to defeat them.)

Not thinking about the logical consequences of everything was another sin (also much discussed in the alternate history panels). Padding, total honesty (as in the line "'No,' she lied."), false pretenses for the book, future slang that doesn't work, not enough research, and many other sins were also mentioned.

Starting the story too soon was another mistake beginners make. The best lesson along these lines is to be learned from Frank Capra's film *Lost Horizon*. When shown in a test screening it did rather poorly, so Capra threw out the first reel of set-up, started the film with people fleeing

to the airport in the midst of a civil war, and made a classic.

One panelist said the sin that annoyed her the most was thinking that plot and character are bourgeois inventions. Other "hot buttons" included stories that turn out to be just a dream and talking heads and disembodied voices. Someone's pet hate was "HAITE," defined as a story that consists of "Here's An Idea. -The End." But they said the worst sin of all was not breaking any of the rules.

Panel: **The Alternate Civil War**

Sunday, 2 PM

George Alec Effinger, Kristine Kathryn Rusch, S. M. Stirling (moderator), Harry Turtledove, Walter Jon Williams

This is the third alternate history panel of the convention and I'm beginning to wonder if Turtledove and Stirling are secretly Siamese twins--I always see them together!

Turtledove again told the story of how his alternate Civil War novel (*The Guns of the South*) came to be written; see the "Build an Alternate History" panel for details. Rusch's alternate Civil War story was this year's Hugo nominee, "The Gallery of His Dreams," which is not alternate history, but time travel involving Matthew Brady. Rusch has, however, written a couple of alternate history stories ("The Best and the Brightest" and "Fighting Bob"), and has a strong background in history. In fact, in college she was the only woman in her "History of War" course, the rest of the students being ROTC enrollees who *had* to take it. Williams wrote "No Spot of Ground," in which Poe becomes a general instead of an author, and mentioned that he had also written an alternate Mary Shelley novel published (or to be published) by Axolotl. Stirling's Drakka trilogy has already been discussed for the "Build an Alternate History" panel. Effinger (who wrote "Everything But Honor," in which an African-American physicist uses a time machine to alter the outcome of the Civil War) arrived late and couldn't even fit on the dais. Note to future conventions: make sure the dais, table, or whatever in each room is large enough for your largest panel in that room! (We had this same problem at the "Hugos for Electronic Fanac?" panel.)

One of the things the panelists emphasized is that if you postulate an alternate Civil War in which the South wins, then you need to rethink World Wars I and II, since their outcomes depended very much on a unified United States. And the panelists reiterated what was suggested at the alternate Civil War panel ("The North Shall Rise Again") at Boskone last year: most people believe that the South couldn't win the war, but the North could lose it. Actually, the Boskone panelists thought that only even worse Northern generals--hard to conceive of--would have made the war last longer, and even then the North couldn't help but win by 1866 or 1867. Only with massive outside intervention did they think a Southern victory possible, and they couldn't come up with a reasonable scenario for such interference. But this certainly ties in with the observation from the MagiCon panelists that often we forget to look at the rest of the world for factors.

The panelists also thought that the argument about the North having all the technology and industry and therefore having the edge because of that was flawed; Turtledove noted that at the end of the war, the South did not lack for guns or bullets or anything produced by the technology. It was more the whole issue of states' rights that caused them problems. Nothing could be decided without all the states agreeing. As I commented about last year's Boskone panel, many areas of the South actually supported the North, West Virginia seceded from Virginia, and Texas almost seceded from the Confederacy. This hardly contributed to a unified front. As Stirling said, "War is a great centralizer": it is very difficult for a loose confederation to win against a unified opponent.

Someone on the panel mentioned that the title didn't specify *which* Civil War, and this led to the suggestion of using the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864) as a basis for an alternate history. It was the largest war between 1800 and 1935, costing 20,000,000 lives and weakening the Manchu Dynasty enough to contribute to its downfall fifty years later. It was started by Hong Xiuchuan, who claimed to be the younger brother of Jesus. He swept through southeastern China and eventually captured Nanjing in 1853, having raised over a million supporters. Eventually he was defeated by Tseng Kuo-Fan, Li Hung-Chang, and Charles George Gordon in 1864. One of the panelists recommended George MacDonald Fraser's *Flashman and the Dragon* as good historical fiction about this era.

A couple of alternate Civil War novels mentioned (and criticized) were Harry Harrison's *A Rebel in Time* and Leonard Skimin's *Gray Victory*. Panelists pointed out that in Harrison's novel a black FBI agent is sent back to stop a Southern white supremacist time traveler. First of all, they wouldn't send a black agent back, and second, the Southerner had supposed never heard of John Brown--a highly unlikely occurrence. In Skimin's book, the people are all from the 20th Century--not literally, but they think like 20th Century people, and talk like 20th Century people, and act like 20th Century people. (It's what my husband Mark calls the *Happy Days* syndrome--the show was set in the 1960s, but everyone in it was straight from the 1980s.)

As to the greater question of why alternate histories are popular, three reasons were suggested. First of all, there is perhaps more dissatisfaction with the present, so people are looking to see how things could be better ("if only") or console themselves that they aren't worse ("thank goodness"). Second, alternate histories allow one to reduce very complex issues to one simple change. They give people the feeling that they could actually control their world. And lastly, more authors are historically trained. Turtledove, for example, has a doctorate in Byzantine history, but there is not a great market for Byzantine historians right now, so he has become an author instead. And as an author, he writes about what he knows best.

Panel: **Opera & SF**

Sunday, 4 PM

Thorarinn Gunnarsson, Evelyn C. Leeper, Mark R. Leeper (moderator),

Originally Lisa Barnett and Susan Shwartz were supposed to be on this panel, but Barnett wasn't able to make it, and Shwartz was so exhausted when she arrived at the Green Room that she decided to skip it and try to get rested enough to judge the masquerade later that evening. (I suspect it was also partially that Mark's idea of what the panel should be about was too analytical for her.) Since I had been the one who had suggested this panel initially, I agreed to help fill in the gap.

Gunnarson was trained as an opera singer, so he had some actual first-hand experience on this subject.

We got into a bit of a discussion at the beginning about exactly what *is* opera. For example, is Jeff Wayne's *War of the Worlds* opera? Technically not, since it has some narration, and opera is defined (at least in some circles) as being entirely sung. On the other hand, that definition excludes Bizet's *Carmen* (generally considered an opera) and includes *Les Miserables* (generally not considered an opera), so I suspect the best definition of opera may be similar to Damon Knight's definition of science fiction: "It's what I point to when I say it."

We also drifted off into a discussion of how opera (actually music in general) fits in with the creative writing process. Some writers say that listening to music while they are writing inspires them; others avoid music at that time. ("While they are writing" was used to mean, I believe, the period of time during which they were working on something, not just the time they were

sitting at the typewriter or word processor.) Gunnarson claimed that Sterling and Shiner fall in the latter category, though someone from the audience said they had heard that these writers did listen to music. The vagueness of what time periods specified may have led to the confusion, but the basic idea--that music can affect what you write--remains.

And this led to a brief listing of books in which opera or music play a role. Thomas M. Disch's *On Wings of Song* is certainly one that examines the power of music. Tom Holt's *Expecting Someone Taller* is a humorous novel set in the world of Wagner's "Ring Cycle." (And Shwartz said that one of Marion Zimmer Bradley's novels is based on Verdi's "La Forza del Destino.") Jack Vance's *Space Opera* deals with a traveling opera company. These three examples show the variety of ways in which a book can relate to opera.

Speaking of Wagner's "Ring" led people to say they had seen the Ring staged in all sorts of settings: mythological, Nineteenth Century, and so on, but not in space. Then someone said they seemed to remember having seen that!

Before coming up with possible science fiction operas, we discussed the requirements for a successful opera in general. It needs a limited cast (you can have a lot of extras, but three dozen major characters will strain the resources of any opera company and the memory of any opera goer). It must also have an emotional story with a clear conclusion. The most difficult requirement is that it not be "narrator-oriented." It turns out that many (most?) of the popular science fiction novels are narrator-oriented, making them unsuitable for opera.

I pointed out that there had been a plan to make an opera of *Star Trek*, but this failed, in large part because the planners had very little knowledge of opera. The proposal was put to the New York City Opera sometime late in 1990 (I believe), but the requirement was that the opera open in 1991 for the 25th Anniversary of the show. But an opera takes much longer than that to plan and stage, and eventually Paramount (or whoever) withdrew the idea.

Other suggestions from the audience and panelists which were not so time-constrained were Tom Godwin's "The Cold Equations" (well, it certainly has a limited cast), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (I'm surprised this hasn't been done already), *Star Wars* (which has been made into a ballet), Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, and any of the Sherlock Holmes stories. Gunnarson has already scored *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. (He also said he had written a diptych *Ere Unto Death* with each piece patterned after the structure of a Beethoven symphony.) Someone observed that *Star Wars* meets all of Verdi's requirements. If anyone can enlighten me as to what these requirements are, I would be grateful.

Picking something to make an opera from is not as easy as it may seem. It was observed that even Shakespeare's works, which would seem like prime candidates, have not transitioned well: only *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* of his thirty-seven plays have been made into operas.

Someone (Gunnarson, I believe) cited a study that claimed in 1991, more people attended opera than attended baseball games. (I wonder if that is counting all baseball down through Little League, or just major league games.)

Someone pointed out this panel was just like real opera: of the fifteen people in the audience, three fell asleep for part of it.

When this panel was announced, I asked on the Net for examples of science fiction operas; this is what I got: .DS .TS center | l. Benford, David & LeGuin, Ursula K. "Rigel-9" Benford, David "Star's End" Blomdahl, Karl-Birger "Aniara" Davis, Anthony & Atherton, Deborah "Under the Double Moon" Drescher, Paul & Eckert, Rinded "Power Failure" Glass, Philip "Einstein on the

Beach" Glass, Philip "1000 Airplanes on the Roof" Glass, Philip "Hydrogen Jukebox" Glass, Philip "Juniper Tree" Glass, Philip & Lessing, Doris "The Making of the Representative from Planet 8" Haydn, J. "Il Mondo della Luna" Janacek, H. "The Excursions of Mr Broucek" Janacek, H. "The Macropoulous Affair" Ligeti, G. "Le Grand Macabre" Mackover, Todd "Valis" Menotti, Giancarlo "A Bride from Pluto" Menotti, Giancarlo "Help, Help the Globolinks!" Monk, Meredith & Chong, Ping "The Games" Offenbach, Jacques "Tales of Hoffman" Offenbach, Jacques "Journey to the Moon" Rice, Jeff "The War of the Worlds" Swan, Donald "Perelandra" ? "A Wrinkle in Time" ? (Robert Anton Wilson's stuff) .TE .DE

An addition suggested during the panel was "The Voyages of Edgar Allan Poe" (composer unknown).

Masquerade

Sunday, 8:30 PM

Rick and Wolf Foss (masters of ceremonies)

The Masquerade began with an announcement that it was being dedicated to the memory of Fritz Leiber, who died Saturday, September 5.

Once again, Mark and I decided to avail ourselves of the privileges accorded us because of our Press ribbons and chose to sit in that section instead of waiting for the mad rush when the doors opened.

Before the masquerade proper, there were the usual announcements, including the one about no flash photography. This was followed immediately by someone taking a flash photo, at which point two guards ran over, grabbed the person, and carried her out. (I suspect it was all staged. :-))

There was no booklet listing the entrants, which would have been a nice touch. I understand the difficulties in producing it, though, since it can't really be done ahead of time, and finding the facilities to produce it over Labor Day weekend may be difficult.

However, the committee did do something new which I think is a great idea: in addition to the usual photography area, they arranged for an area where the visually impaired could *feel* the costumes (assuming this was okay with the entrants, one supposes--it's conceivable that a costume could be so fragile as to preclude any touching). I would be curious to know if anyone took advantage of this arrangement.

As usual, the children's masquerade preceded the main section. There were only three entries, so this went fairly quickly. There were about fifty entries in the main masquerade, and everything had been organized so that this section went smoothly, and the first run-through was finished around 10:30 PM, which gave me plenty of time to make the preview at 11:30. The quality of the costumes this year was well above that of the preceding few years, and the spate of fan-fold costumes that one seemed to be seeing all the time for a while has given way to a more varied assortment. (For example, "St. Alia of the Knife" used a stained-glass-window effect.) However, there are still too many which are songs or skits rather than costumes, though the number seems to be declining--I don't know if this means that people have gotten the message, or that the committee is actually weeding out the non-costumes. In general, I was in agreement with the awards: "At the Ball" for Best of Class (Novice), "Pumpkinhead" for Best of Class (Journeyman), "Ice Spirits" for "Best in Class" (Master), "St. Alia of the Knife" for Most Spectacular, and "Heroes" for Best of Show. (There were other awards, but these were the major ones.)

I would like to point out that "Heroes," the Best in Show (and most people's favorite to judge by the applause), was a Journeyman entry. (There are three classes: Novice, Journeyman, and Master; which category you are in depends on how many awards you have won in previous contests.) This was an entry based on the works of Gordon R. Dickson, and consisted of two large models of books. As the covers were opened and the pages turned, characters in the illustrations stepped out of the books and came to life, while the voice-over narration described how the reader, a young boy, learned about heroism, bravery, loyalty, and so on, from these books. I hope Dickson was there to see it; if not, I hope someone sends him a videotape of it.

(One of our friends missed the masquerade; he was paged before it started and it turned out his son had broken his hand in the car door.)

Preview: **Doors**

Sunday, 11:30 PM

George R. R. Martin

This was the second showing of the sneak preview of the Columbia Pictures/ABC pilot *Doors*, and was somewhat sparsely attended. I assume most of the people interested in it attended the first show, but I didn't realize it was an alternate history show until friends returning from the first showing told me so.

The title, by the way, will be changed. The studio thought that there would be no confusion between this and the film *The Doors* but Jim Morrison's estate thought otherwise, so the studio is casting about for a new name. The most likely candidate at this point seems to be *Doorways*.

This was the pilot for the series (six more scripts have been ordered, each of which will be an hour long). This film was seventy minutes long, designed to run in a ninety-minute time slot. (The European version will be in a two-hour slot, with some additional scenes.) This was a very rough cut, minus many of the special effects, sound looping, and color timing. The music used was only temporary and there were no credits. In particular, the special effect of the Door itself is missing.

The show starts out in our world. An unidentified woman is brought into the hospital. This turns out to be Cat, a fugitive from some cyborg warriors who are chasing her through "doors" to bring her back to their timeline under the orders of a "Dark Lord." She escapes the hospital with Tom, the doctor who decides to help her get to the door opening up in Colorado. They get there, have a fight with the warriors, and Tom ends up going through the door with her--at which point he finds out the doors are one-way only (or so Cat thinks). This new world is one in which some bioengineering got out of hand around 1978 and a bug ate all the oil in the world, and in fact, all petroleum-based products. (This bug is apparently still around, since in the longer version there is a scene in which Tom's credit cards dissolve.) So we have what looks like almost a standard post-holocaust society, with cars being pulled as wagons by horses (shades of *Things to Come*), and all sorts of mongrel technology. The warriors have followed them through, however, and even follow them to Denver when they arrange to have an injured man flown there by U.S. Post Office hot-air balloon, in part because a door is opening there soon. This door opens after Tom and Cat again fight the warriors, and they jump through and almost fall down what appears to be a giant cliff. Then the camera pulls back and we see they're really standing on the top of a giant Mt. Rushmore-type sculpture (in Colorado?--they've already said the doors don't change your time or physical location) with the sculptured faces of Benjamin Franklin, Davy Crockett, Victoria Woodhull, and an Iroquois chief whose name I didn't catch.

The show is full of humor of the sort copied from Arnold Schwarzenegger movies. In one

scene, Tom says, "Of all the emergency rooms in all the hospitals in all the world, why did you have to come into mine?" There's a running gag about Cat biting people's noses off. Mercifully, there were no jokes about "Tom and Cat."

There were some minor flaws in the script, with characters behaving in unlikely ways. My major complaint was that there was too much in it. The parallel worlds would have been enough without the warriors and the Dark Lords and all that stuff. But it *is* alternate history, so if and when it shows up, I'll be watching. Whether it lasts is another story. As Martin said, "Our success will be determined by how well we do."

Panel: **Lost Art of the Newszine**

Monday, 1 PM

Mike Glycer (moderator), Timothy Lane, Dick Lynch, Laurie Mann

The first thing I heard when I got to this panel was that Mike Glycer is hoping I get my con report done early so he can use it to help him write the con report for *File 770*. Talk about ego-boo!

One reason proposed for the decline of the newszine was the rise of electronic bulletin boards and electronic communications in general. By the time any traditional fanzine can get out, almost everyone has already heard what news there was. What the boards don't cover, the semi-prozines do, and with more staff and money than a fanzine can dedicate. And even a lot of clubzines have started printing news of interest to their members as well. Newszines have to be timely, and unless they're done electronically, that's almost impossible these days. Of course, I pointed out that Mark has said that between the death of live television in the 1950s and the rise of electronic bulletin boards in the 1980s, there was no real way to make a fool of yourself instantaneously around the world. Now, once again, there is. And even newszines are not immune, and make mistakes. Consider last year's Hugo nominees list that appeared in *Locus*: in an effort to scoop the competition, *Locus* printed up the first list Chicon V sent them. (Chicon was using *Locus* to verify the story lengths, so *Locus* was in a privileged position.) After it was typeset and almost ready to go to press, Chicon released a longer list of nominees--the short list was due to a misunderstanding of where the cut-off was to make the ballot. So *Locus* ran an addendum to their list of nominations with more nominations. But the result was that nominees and voters knew whether someone had been at the top of the nominations list, or further down. A lot of finger-pointing went on, but I would say the basic flaw is in giving one newszine a preference over the others by releasing the names to them first. Surely the committees can find a better way to validate nominations.

People who still produce newszines say that this timeliness forces them to drop a lot of letters of comment to make room for current news. Long convention reports also get cut. (Long convention reports? No one writes those any more, do they? :-)

On the other hand, there is still a need for a newszine that interprets the facts, instead of just reporting them. (Consider the parallel to the everyday world. We get our factual news from radio or television, but many people still subscribe to a weekly "news magazine" which gives us more of an interpretation and background for the news than we can get from other, more immediate sources.)

Mike Glycer closed by reading the Hugu winners, which I do not have handy, so I hope he saved his copy for *File 770*.

Someone on the panel described this as a panel of heavyweights; I don't think they were speaking entirely figuratively. :-)

Miscellaneous

All business passed on to the MagiCon WSFS Business Meeting passed, including counting electronic fan writing toward Hugo fan writer eligibility and restricting Hugo voting and business meeting participation to natural persons only. (I guess this rules out Data, right?) The electronic fan writing amendment contains a reference to "generally available electronic media," which should prove an interesting phrase when the issue of electronic fanzines comes up, since WSFS has now recognized the concept that electronic media *can* be considered "generally available."

The hotel had an automatic check-out through the television, and it was working, making check-out a breeze.

One more time, 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
LACon
Chicon V
Discon II
Seacon
Confederation
Chicon IV
ConFiction
Conspiracy
Iguanacon
Suncon
Nolacon II
Constellation

I note in passing that this con report clocks in at about 20,000 words, my longest ever, which I would like to attribute to the abundance of interesting programming rather than my own verbosity. (At Chicon V last year I went to twelve panels; this year at MagiCon I went to sixteen.)

In another hard-fought battle, Glasgow won the bid for 1995, making 1994/1995 the first time the Worldcon has been out of the United States for two years in a row. 2541 votes were cast, even more than last year's heavy voting of 2108: 1310 for Glasgow and 1147 for Atlanta. The counting went much faster than last year, because the ballots, mail-in *and* on-site, were validated (verified that each voter was a member of Magicon and had paid his or her voting fee) as they arrived. Samuel R. Delany and Gerry Anderson are the Guests of Honour; the Fan Guest of Honour will be announced at ConFrancisco. The convention will be called Intersection and be August 24 through 28, 1995. (Contact address in the United States is Theresa Renner, Box 15430, Washington DC 20003.) In a very lightly voted contest, Atlanta won the NASFIC: DragonCon, which will be held July 12-16, 1995. (Note that this was not the same committee that bid for the Worldcon.) It will be fascinating to see what the unusual scheduling of the con does. Will there be more fans who attend both? Will more students and teachers attend the NASFIC? Stay tuned.

Next year in San Francisco!

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