

**Noreascon 4**  
**A convention report by Evelyn C. Leeper**  
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Table of Contents:

- | [Arrival](#)
- | [Hotel](#)
- | [Registration](#)
- | [Dealers Room](#)
- | [Art Show](#)
- | [Programming](#)
- | [How To Read For Pleasure](#)
- | [Writers We Don't Understand](#)
- | [Must-See TV and Movies](#)
- | [What is Genre?](#)
- | [The Two Cultures in F&SF: Science Confronts the Humanities](#)
- | [Kennedy Survives Dallas--Then What?](#)
- | [The King Kong Thing](#)
- | [Everything You Know Is Wrong: SF That Questions Reality](#)
- | [The Time Machine--Guest Interviews and The 1953 Retro Awards](#)
- | [Great Moments from SF Films](#)
- | [Reality Ain't What It Used To Be: Secret Histories and Urban Fantasies](#)
- | [The One Foot SF and Horror Film Reference Bookshelf](#)
- | [The Next Fifty Years: Where Will the Next Big Things Come From?](#)
- | [If Rome Never Fell...](#)
- | [Alternate History Challenge Match](#)
- | [The Numinous in Science Fiction and Fantasy](#)
- | [The Sidewise Award](#)
- | [The Hugo Awards](#)
- | [Fanzine Lounge](#)
- | [The Human Cloning Wars](#)
- | [Lonely Planet: The Extinction of Everybody But Us](#)
- | [Jewish Time-Based Mitzvoth in a Lunar Colony](#)
- | [The Masquerade](#)
- | [Alternate Holocausts](#)
- | [The Abuse of Biology in SF](#)
- | [When Fans Die....](#)
- | [Miscellaneous](#)

Noreascon 4 was held at the Sheraton Boston and Hynes Convention Center September 2-6, 2004. Attendance was about 5300.

Thanks to many recommendations, we parked at Alewife (\$4.50/day instead of \$34/day at the Sheraton!). However, by 11:30 AM, Alewife parking was pretty full, and the attendant tried to get us to park on the right side of the curving on-ramp! Once we realized he had motioned us over to park and not just temporarily, it was *very* difficult to get out and past the cars in front of us. No way would we park there for five days!

### **Hotel**

The T was fast. The hotel was not. When we arrived at 12:30PM, we were too early; they said to come back after 3:00PM. We came back at 5:00PM. The room still was not ready, supposedly due to late check-outs by airline crews; they said to come back in an hour or so. We came back at 6:15PM. The room still was not ready; now the story was that someone had dropped a ring down the sink and

they had had to dismantle the plumbing. They said to come back in 45 minutes. Mark went back at 7:15PM and stood there until 8:30PM, when we finally got our room. (Some people apparently had to wait until midnight!) Our decision to skip Boskone has been reinforced by our unhappiness with the Sheraton Boston.

(We were lucky to have someone offer to take the three of us and luggage (!) back to Alewife Monday--it saved us having to take the shuttle bus that replaced part of the Red Line. Thanks, Pete!)

### **Registration**

Registration was fast--there were no lines. Program participant pick-up was conveniently located in the same room rather than at Program Ops or the Green Room. Some freebies were in the registration area, but most were on the second floor in a better-trafficked area.

### **Dealers Room**

The Dealers Room was pretty good. I went through the whole thing on Thursday afternoon and parts of it as I passed through other times--one of the shortcuts from the Hynes Convention Center to the Sheraton was at the back of the Dealers Room.

### **Art Show**

I made my usual one-pass through the art show, figuring if I did not have any more time I would at least have more or less seen everything. The Retrospective Art Show was good, but not a patch on the one at Chicon 2000 (which I am sure inspired it). The artists who caught my eye included Heidi Hooper, whom I have mentioned before as doing amazing works in the medium of dryer lint. (It turns out a friend of mine from college is one of the people who saves lint for her. The brighter colors tend to come from washing throw rugs and such.) Other artists whose work caught my eye included: - Gnemo (fantasy zeppelins) - Nezir - Makoto Sakuma - Debbie Notkin (full-figured nudes) - Robert H. Knox (whose work reminded me of Ivan Albright's [the artist who painted the portrait used in the 1945 film "The Picture of Dorian Gray"]) - Tom Kidd (more retro zeppelins) - Charles Laing (weird creatures reminiscent of Giuseppe Archimbaldi) - Joe DeVito's work for his new graphic novel "Kong"

### **Programming**

I left a lot of panels early. This is in large part because I discovered if I did not, I would get to the next panel late. The five-minute warnings tended to come through at five minutes before the hour, rather than ten or fifteen. (My understanding is that the panels should be fifty minutes long, with a ten-minute gap for "fluid adjustment".)

Another problem was that changes to panels (especially room changes) should have been posted outside the both the original and revised rooms, and were not.

In addition to describing the items I got to, I have also listed what I would have liked to see had they not conflicted with other panels, been too full, or conflicted with things like standing around the hotel desk waiting for our room. :-)

I also list my estimate of the attendance for the panels I went to, on the theory that this may help better assign rooms by size next time around.

**How To Read For Pleasure  
Thu 2:00PM, H204**

**Paul DiFilippo, Leigh Grossman (m), Ernest Lilley, Val Ontell, Pat York**

Description: "This isn't about being a 'better reader'--but how to really enjoy what you're reading more!"

Estimated attendance: 25 people

Grossman began by asking, "What makes a book pleasurable?" This elicited mostly personal answers that were not very useful for helping the audience enjoying reading more. York wanted a book to "take me somewhere I'm not." Ontell said, "I'm a character-oriented person."

DiFilippo pointed out that these were not useful answers; there is a wide divergence of taste, but there may be general rules for extracting pleasure from a book. He cited Mark Twain's observation that work is what you are forced to do, and pleasure is what you choose to do, so the first step to enjoyment is not to become a book reviewer. Grossman observed that the panel consisted of reviewers and teachers, people either who are forced to read things or who force others to read things. DiFilippo asked how many people force themselves to finish something they are not enjoying. Grossman said that for classics, his approach is to assign the book to his class in order to force himself to read it.

I pointed out that this also forces his students to read things they may not enjoy, which may make them associate reading with non-enjoyment. And indeed, forcing oneself to read books one is not enjoying can have the same effect. Warning about the dangers of academia in general, Lilly said, "I never take a course in anything I'm remotely interested in." Grossman also later observed that the best are not necessarily the most enjoyable, but also that when a book is presented as "important", it is easy to not realize that there is enjoyment and even humor in it. (In my experience, this is certainly true of Herman Melville's "Moby Dick" and Nikolai Gogol's "Dead Souls".)

Along these lines, DiFilippo noted there had been a recent article in "The New York Times" (I believe) about how teachers keep assigning downbeat novels when what the students are really interested in reading is "Harry Potter".

York also observed, "Ever since I began writing, I read differently"--in particular, more critically.

DiFilippo said that when reading, one must "approach a book on its own terms" and also "like a wine taster, . . . cleanse my palate between books." In terms of enjoyment, he asked, "Are we searching for this numinous experience we had as kids?"

Ontell said that one can convey enthusiasm for a book, and Grossman said that if enthusiasm is contagious, "Harry Potter is the Black Plague of fantasy." He also added "The Da Vinci Code" as another example.

Someone mentioned audiobooks and DiFilippo said that Jeff VanderMeer would not listen to readings by authors because he feels it constrains the book to just that interpretation and voice. (Ironically, VanderMeer himself was doing a reading at Noreascon 4 !) Lilly disagreed: he enjoys the most when he does *not* have enough time, or when listening to audio-books, because those conditions force the author's pace and prevent "read-ahead."

DiFilippo tried to get more general and said that pleasure is really a range of emotions, and asked if one can derive pleasure from a tragedy? Grossman added that catharsis and pleasure are not the same thing, but that works such as Robert Silverberg's "Dying Inside" and Shakespearean tragedies provide a cathartic "pleasure" of sorts. (Mark added John Steinbeck "Of Mice and Men".)

Physical conditions do matter, though someone pointed out that most of us probably do a lot of reading on airplanes--definitely not the most comfortable setting. (I can remember my experience of

reading all of Shakespeare's plays, one a week, by sitting down in the recliner with my Shakespeare mug full of good coffee.)

I also wanted to see: (Really) Hard Science for Beginners, How Possible is Time Travel?, Great (New!) British SF and Fantasy

### **Writers We Don't Understand**

**Thu 3:00PM, H311**

**Paul DiFilippo, Carl Frederick, Eileen Gunn, Matthew Jarpe (m)**

Description: "Charlie Stross loads his stories with so much IT jargon it makes the head spin. A Ph.D. in Physics is necessary to get full enjoyment out of a Greg Egan novel. China Mieville is best read with an open dictionary handy. Are these writers doing this on purpose? Are they that much smarter than the rest of us, or are we getting a year of painstaking research downloaded into us in a compressed format? Is there a good stylistic reason to confuse your readers?"

Estimated attendance: 30 people

Jarpe began by taking the credit (or blame) for the description and for the authors named. And he also said, "[There are] lots of things I don't understand in Charlie Stross's stories." Frederick wondered if some of this was not intentional, quoting Oscar Wilde as having said, "I constantly live in the fear of not being misunderstood."

DiFilippo also named Stross and Egan as hard to understand, but added that there are "many levels to this understanding thing." He said that you may think it is okay while you are reading, but as soon as you put it down, the understanding evaporates. On the other hand, he took solace in Thomas Pynchon's observation that "sometimes the maps of your ignorance are more interesting than the maps of your knowledge."

Frederick picked up on the "many levels", saying there could be difficulties in understanding the content (e.g., string theory), the writing (e.g., James Joyce), the vocabulary (e.g., Mervyn Peake), or the jargon (e.g., Stross). He was not too worried, saying, "I like to misunderstand; it is my nature to be lost."

Gunn felt that this "hard-to-understand" quality might be the "quintessential science fiction hit", that is, starting something incomprehensible and sorting it out. "It's the pleasure you get from science fiction." DiFilippo agreed that temporary non-understanding is okay, but both Frederick and Jarpe asked how a reader is to know if he or she will ever understand it. Gunn suggested that reading the reviews might give you some idea.

DiFilippo thought that sometimes the problem was that while each action was clear, the intent was not clear for the story as a whole. He named a Delany story, but I think this is true of a lot of mainstream fiction.

Jarpe said that Charles Sheffield's "Georgia on My Mind" had mathematics, but you skip it and still understand the story. On the other hand, Greg Egan's "Singleton" "depends on a very esoteric distinction in quantum mechanics." Frederick replied that "math and theoretical physics are ineffably beautiful," but also conceded that this is hard to convey outside the field.

Gunn said that both the writer and the reader have a responsibility, the writer to convey as much as possible, the reader to skip what is incomprehensible rather than to give up. Frederick disagreed, saying it was primarily the writer's responsibility.

DiFilippo gave Stephen Baxter and Kim Stanley Robinson as examples of writers who do make the abstruse understandable. For example, he said that Baxter does this by using homely metaphors.

Jarpe returned to Stross, quoting Gardner Dozois as saying, "He's the kumquat Hagen-Daz." He gave a sample line from Stross as an example of how one must know the jargon to understand him: "A man walked into a bar and the air was thick with Bluetooth." Gunn said, "If you read enough boing-boing, you will understand Charles Stross." *That's* my problem--I do not know what "boing-boing" is, let alone read it.

Jarpe thought that these authors would be good applications for hypertext. Vernor Vinge tried it in the CD-ROM edition of "A Fire Upon the Deep", but I have not seen it much since. For that matter, annotated texts have existed for some time now.

Frederick thinks that one problem with modern science fiction is that fifty years ago the confusing physics had not made it into popular physics, so it also had not made it into science fiction either. He finds Russian novels like "The Brothers Karamazov" hard to understand; when he first read that one, he thought there were twice as many characters because of the confusing Russian names.

Someone in the audience said that if you can understand the jargon, you are having a different reading experience than the average reader. Another person said that some books are hard to understand because they are more literary and revel in the language more, and gave as examples John Crowley and China Mieville. Frederick talked about the richness of English, and quoted Kipling saying, "There are no synonyms in English." (Apparently Kipling later amended this to exclude "gorse" and "furze".)

Someone said that Delany's "Dahlgren" was hard to understand. Gunn responded that Delany in general is about the impossibility of knowing everything, and that is in fact characteristic of all modernist literature.

This non-understandability is not new; DiFilippo pointed out that A. E. Van Vogt was considered unreadable. And it is in other fields as well. Frederick said that Sir Arthur Eddington wrote a very dense physics book that people still are not sure whether it makes sense or not. Frederick also said that he felt stupid after reading Tom Stoppard's "Arcadia". DiFilippo closed by saying that when Raymond Chandler was asked to explain something in his novel "The Big Sleep", even he did not understand it.

### **Must-See TV and Movies**

**Thu 3:00PM, H205**

**Chris Barkley, Daniel Kimmel, Craig Miller (m), and John Scalzi**

Description: "Are you cineliterate? Can you call yourself a fan if you can't recognize 'Klaatu berada nicto?' Do you know who Tom Corbett is? Why you should stay away from pod people? We'll talk about the classics, and even the good stuff, from Metropolis to Rocketship XM to Princess Monomoke [sic]..."

[Mark Leeper kindly reports on this one.]

Rather than cover the description of the films, which is easy enough to find on the Internet, I will just list the films and TV programs listed by each panelist.

Chris Barkley:

- | "The Prisoner"
- | "The Avengers"
- | "Fireball X15"
- | "Stingray"

Daniel Kimmel:

- | A TRIP TO THE MOON

- | METROPOLIS
- | THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN
- | THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD
- | THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD
- | FORBIDDEN PLANET
- | THE INVASION OF BODY SNATCHERS
- | DR. STRANGELOVE OR: HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE BOMB
- | COLOSSUS
- | SLEEPER
- | BLADERUNNER
- | THE FLY (1986)
- | Andrew Nichol films: THE TRUMAN SHOW, SIMONE, and particularly GATTACA
- | "Deep Space Nine"
- | THINGS TO COME

Craig Miller:

- | DARK CITY
- | THX-1138

John Scalzi:

- | the films of German Expressionism
- | anime
- | the films of Akira Kurosawa

Audience contributions:

- | WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE
- | QUARK
- | BUBBLEGUM CRISIS
- | "V"
- | PLANET OF APES SERIES
- | GOJIRA (a.k.a. GODZILLA)
- | The "Quatermass" films (from Mark Leeper)
- | FANTASTIC PLANET
- | THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS
- | "Space 1999"
- | "UFO"
- | "Tom Corbett, Space Cadet" (from Joe Ross)
- | "Space Patrol" (from Joe Ross)
- | "Stargate Atlantis"
- | CHARLY

[Thanks again to Mark.]

I also wanted to see: Must-See TV and Movies (see above), Robots' Rights, Prejudices We Haven't Thought of...Yet, Riding the Slipstream, The Seven Deadly Sins of SF and Fantasy, Godzilla: My Favorite Monster, Fantasy Forensics

**What is Genre?**

**Fri 11:00AM, H301**

**Ellen Asher, Jay Caselberg (m), James Minz, Takayuki Tatsumi, Carrie Vaughn**

Description: "Ellen Kushner has informed us about the recently formed website of the Interstitial Arts Foundation. A browse shows lots of great reading and fiercely intelligent discussion on a range of topics that span literature, art, music and performance which cannot easily be classified by conventional genre boundaries or any boundaries at all. We will skip the paradox of such 'interstitial arts' forming its own genre and cut to the chase. What does it mean to be part of a 'genre'? If you don't fit comfortably in SF or fantasy or horror or mainstream or fiction/nonfiction, where do they file you in the bookstore? What is the larger cultural significance of crossover material? What does it imply for the future of SF literature? Who is writing stories that fall between the cracks?"

Estimated attendance: 20 people

The question Caselberg suggested at the beginning was, "Do you believe there is such a thing as a clearly defined genre?"

Asher thought yes in the center, but less so at the edges. "The Lord of the Rings" is clearly fantasy; the "Foundation" series is clearly science fiction. But the "Pern" novels have no clearly defined genre—the content is science fiction, but the structure is fantasy. In the Science Fiction Book Club (for which she has been editor for a quarter of a century), genre-labeling is critical because of the mail-order nature of the business. Readers cannot pick up the book and flip through it to determine the genre.

Minz gave another example of books that "transcended" genre: "The Sparrow" and "The Children of God" by Mary Doria Russell. He cited David Hartwell as saying that these are good novels, but they are not good *science fiction* novels even though in terms of content they are clearly science fiction. Though they have some similarities to James Blish's "A Case of Conscience", structurally they are very different.

Vaughn asked if readers actually care about labeling, and Asher reiterated, "Oh, God, yes!" Minz (who works at Tor) said that in addition to the specific issues Asher had, publishers need to worry about what cover to give a book. (One need only look at the fiasco when the first paperback publication of Connie Willis's "Doomsday Book" was given a romance-novel-type cover to realize the truth of this.) Caselberg pointed out that "Interzone" has featured rockets on its covers for twenty-five years, even if there were none inside.

Authors can find that even when they break out of a genre, they are still lumped within it. For example, Tatsumi pointed out that William Gibson's "Pattern Recognition" is not science fiction, but everyone pretty much treats it as though it is. It has current technology, not future technology yet, Tatsumi says, it is still "hardcore cyberpunk." Tatsumi cited Gibson's own comments about the question of whether science fiction is a ghetto or an artistic bohemia (from the preface to Eileen Gunn's "Stable Strategies and Others"), but also said that we create a mismorphia in considering the mainstream as a single category.

Vaughan responded that writers often feel that they have to write in a specific genre, perhaps because when they do not, they are often rejected as being "too something else."

Asher saw genre has being beneficial in helping the readers to find what they will like among the vast number of books. Caselberg pointed out that the downside of this is, "Readership is to blame for the bounding of walls." He said that current British writers are copying Iain Banks, Mary Gentle, and M. John Harrison because they see their works as defining "the new science fiction".

Caselberg proposed his own definition to split science fiction and fantasy: "Science fiction is the world that could be; fantasy is the worlds that could not." Of course, that puts the "Foundation" series, with faster-than-light travel, firmly into the fantasy camp.... (Asher said that Damon Knight's definition was that science fiction is what is technically possible. Same problem.)

Someone in the audience described genre categories as providing "tools for managing expectations." This was not precisely a restatement of what Asher had said earlier--Asher seemed to view genre as a way of narrowing down what one looked at or bought, while this just says that a reader will not pick up a fantasy book expecting a lot of hard science explanations of things.

Vaughan said there are also new genres like "slipstream" and "interstitial"; Caselberg added "the new weird." Of course, the whole idea of these labels was that the works described did not fit into a single genre, so inventing one for them is sort of like describing "the club consisting of all people who do not belong to any other club". As Minz noted, "If I could make [interstitial] a category, it would defeat its purpose." A lot of this is probably fall-out from the whole "If you like X, then you will like Y" thing.

Caselberg talked about a genre author's "breakout novel", and asked why there was such emphasis on it when genre books get more review space, etc. (One could argue that review space in "Locus" is not equal to review space in the "New York Times".) Minz pointed out that the mainstream popularity can be transitory--"The Sparrow" did very well at first as a mainstream novel, but it found its permanent home in science fiction.

Minz also noted that "best seller" is just as much a genre or category as "science fiction". Also he said that on publisher was starting a paranormal romance line, indicating the further balkanization of novels. But because the chain stores have buyers for specific categories, one cannot effectively cross-market works that cross genres.

Asher was concerned that science fiction and fantasy readers have become more narrow in their tastes because books have become so long. No one wants to "take a chance" on a 700-page book (or worse yet, a trilogy of them). Minz thought that some of the recent anthologies of novellas might help, but one problem is that (at least for those in which authors write in their pre-existing series) the novellas do not stand well on their own. This tendency of readers to continue with authors who continue to write in the same world was described by Minz as "the McDonald's effect"--it may not be great, but it is predictable.

Someone said that one author was told by his agent, "One of your problems is that all your books are so different."

Places where one can find cross-genre pieces tend to be web sites or small press works: [strangehorizons.com](http://strangehorizons.com), [scifiction.com](http://scifiction.com), "Polyphony", "Lady Churchill's Wrist Bracelet", and so on. The "New Yorker" used to be a good market, and Tatsumi says that such authors as Haruki Murakami are still appearing there.

Vaughan said that another aspect of a genre, at least of science fiction, is that "we have to deal with this shared language we've been writing in for fifty years," and that mainstream readers coming in just do not get it.

Minz said that while new genres are appearing, the western genre is dying off. Caselberg mentioned "chick-lit" (which he described as "sex and shopping"), but did not expect it to last as a genre.

Vaughan attempted to add at least a veneer of academia when he noted that Aristotle recognized three "genres": lyric, ethic or narrative, and dramatic.

Caselberg found it interesting that the science fiction community is the only one to adopt the word "genre", as in "Is this book genre?" meaning is it science fiction, fantasy, or horror.

Genre classifications are probably here to stay. Asher lamented, "We got tarred with the Buck Rogers brush long ago," and Minz said of mysteries, "They had Bogie; we had William Shatner."

I also wanted to see: Modernism and SF, The World Map of 2100--What Does It Look Like? (but it was too crowded), The Radio Play as an Ideal Form for SF, and SF Without Smiles (Barry Malzberg could not make it, and he was the main reason I wanted to see it )

**The Two Cultures in F&SF: Science Confronts the Humanities**  
**Fri 1:00PM, H203**  
**Ctein (m), Matthew Jarpe, Nancy Kress, Justine Larbalestier**

Description: "Decades ago, C.P. Snow defined the "Two Cultures" of technical intellectuals and literary intellectuals. The split is still with us. How does it influence our fantasy and science fiction? What works, what authors manage to bridge the gap? What works or authors make it deeper?"

Estimated attendance: 40 people

Ctein said that he had moderated this same panel twenty-two years ago at Chicon IV, and while it made sense then it no longer does, because there has been too much blurring of the lines for it to make sense.

Nevertheless, the panel continued.

[I suppose I should note that I am trained in science, but lean somewhat toward literature.]

Kress said that she was on the literary side, and "I [write hard science fiction] on the basis of amazingly little knowledge.

Larbalestier said that her next novel mixed the two in the sense of being based on mathematics and the Fibonacci numbers.

Kress said that so much science has crept into the popular culture (e.g., computers, movies) that the line is definitely blurred. But, she warned, "the version of science carried over is very debased." Kress said that she herself does a lot of hand-waving, and was horrified when her daughter-in-law said, "I get all of my science from your novels." She also said that while she expected to have to explain quantum theory and Einstein, she did not expect to have to explain gravity.

Jarpe (pronounced JAR-pee) said that the best (most accurate) depiction of a scientist is in China Mieville's "Perdido Street Station". Larbalestier said this was interesting, as Mieville had a doctorate in economics, not usually considered a hard science. (She later added, "Economics is the alchemy of the current age.")

Ctein felt that fans have a debased view of the humanities. The debates over the forms of the New Wave, for example, indicated an ignorance in that they were not recognized as old. Larbalestier said that she had the same trouble explaining post-structuralism to non-English majors as she does explaining cricket to Americans. Kress said that *she* does not understand deconstructionism and she has a doctorate in English. (She also said that she is not sure if this is a bad thing.)

Larbalestier said that many fans are negative on style and will criticize a story as being "overridden with style", but how you write a story affects the story.

Someone in the audience noted that the general feeling is that everyone needs some familiarity with literature, but not with science. (Isaac Asimov noted this years ago, when he said that people will volunteer the fact that they hated math and did badly in it, but would never think of boasting that they could not read.) Kress said the result of this is that scientists tend to be more knowledgeable about literature than novelists or poets are about science.

Larbalestier said that Snow was writing from a British perspective, and in Britain you are expected to

specialize in university much earlier than in the United States, limiting the cross-over. Ctein noted that Snow also wrote at the beginning of the most technological century, and attitudes were very different then than now. Larbalestier also gave her definition of the two cultures: "The humanities is everything I understand; the sciences is everything I don't."

Someone asked about which category the statistical analysis of literature would fall into. Larbalestier said the example she thought of was a paper on the use of conjunctions in Jane Austen.

Kress made a distinction between *science* fiction (which seemed to be what Snow was talking about), and science *fiction*, which is what she is trying to write. There is also now a lot of literary science writing from actual scientists such as Oliver Sacks and Stephen Hawking. Larbalestier recommended "Parasite Rex" by Carl Zimmer, which she described as being about "evolution and where we come from and the little critters that live in our brain".

Various audience members tried to define the distinction between the two cultures. One said that science is about how things work, and the humanities is about people. Another said that science is how, and the humanities is what. A third said that science is objective and the humanities is subjective. Kress pointed out that even in science, the presence or absence of an observer can affect the outcome. Ctein got even deeper when he asked how we can believe in an objective reality when we are living in a subjective methodology.

For the audience, Michael Flynn suggested, "Science: you can measure things. Humanities: man is the measure of all things." On a more practical level, another person said that science is what you get from newspapers, and the humanities is what you get from television.

Jarpe said that science has to start with a hypothesis. Kress thought not, and gave the example of Jonathan Weiner's "Beak of the Finch", where Weiner collected data on nuts and finches and then formulated a theory on their evolution. (However, I think Weiner had some hypothesis at the beginning, namely that there was a connection between the finches' beaks and the nuts they ate.)

The final proposal from the audience on defining science was that science is that which provides for the possibility of falsifiability.

### **Kennedy Survives Dallas--Then What?**

**Fri 2:00PM, H304**

**Mitchell Freedman, Joseph T. Major, Mike Resnick, Shane Tourtellotte (m)**

Description: "It's Boston, it's 40+ years since Dallas, politics abounds--how can we not do this? This panel takes for granted an alternative past to explore an alternative present-- what if JFK was not killed at Dallas? What does the present look like? For example: the base on Mars is now 10 years old. Bobby Kennedy was impeached for violating civil liberties. What Vietnam war? Who would the parties be nominating this year? Once you change one fundamental aspect of the past, how do you spell out the ripples through the near future? Or ... is history so chaotic that thirty years later much of the detail of life would be unpredictably different? ... or not much changed at all?"

Estimated attendance: 60 people

Tourtellotte began by saying that some dates sear themselves into one's memory, and November 22, 1963, is one of them. (Of course--it is the day that both Aldous Huxley and C. S. Lewis died. :-)) Resnick agreed, pointing out, for example, that Barry Mazlish has written eleven books centering around JFK. Tourtellotte admitted he was a bit of an odd choice to moderate the panel, as he was born in 1968 and so cannot possibly remember where he was when he heard that Kennedy had been shot.

Resnick observed that Kennedy is actually more like today's Republicans than today's Democrats--he believed in a vigorous foreign policy, aggressive intervention overseas, and tax cuts. So he was really

more like Bush than like Kerry. Major said, however, that *Robert Kennedy* would probably make Al Sharpton look like a conservative. Also, JFK's tax cuts were geared differently than Bush's. (Presumably he meant that JFK's tax cuts would benefit the lower and middle classes at least as much as the rich.) In addition, Major said that had JFK survived, he would have been unlikely to have met his plan of pulling out of Vietnam by 1965.

Mitchell Freedman asked, "Would Kennedy have embraced the Beatles?" Mike Resnick showed his age when he responded, "I wouldn't have. I think all good music stopped with the Andrews Sisters." But he added, "When did you ever see a politician ever not put his arm around someone who was momentarily popular?"

The consensus of the panel was that had Kennedy survived, he would have won re-election in 1964. Freedman said that JFK was not going to win the South in any case (with or without the Civil Rights Act), but that if Goldwater were his opponent, Goldwater spoke his mind a bit too much to win. He also said that the Republicans were more controlled by big business then than now (which many will find hard to believe). Freedman suggested that rather than Goldwater, the Republicans might have chosen Rockefeller, and he could have won. Scranton and Romney were other possibilities for 1964, but Nixon was definitely not.

Resnick said that no matter who the Republicans ran in 1964, there would have been another set of debates, and Kennedy would have won those.

Most of these scenarios assumed no attempt at assassination. Tourtelotte asked about a scenario in which Kennedy was shot but only wounded. There was some discussion about how much information about the injury would be revealed. Resnick said that nothing leaked in the 1960s unless the government wanted it to leak.

Freedman asked whether without Kennedy one would have Medicare or the Civil Rights Act, both brought about by Johnson. (Or, I might add, the space program. I suspect that once JFK became a martyr of sorts, people felt more obligation to carry the space program on than they might have had he served a normal term.)

Regarding the Civil Rights Act, Resnick said, "I'm convinced that to the day of his death Johnson thought of black people as n-----s, yet with the Civil Rights Bill he did more for them than any other President who didn't."

In closing, the panelists said that with all the different advisors Kennedy had, there was no consensus then on what direction our Vietnam policy should take, and hence there could be no predictions from the panelists either.

### **The King Kong Thing**

**Fri 3:00PM, H206**

**Joseph DeVito, Bob Eggleton, Daniel Kimmel (m), Mark R. Leeper**

Description: "Lord of the Rings director Peter Jackson's schedule for 2005 includes release of his new film about the world's most lovable big ape. Will his take automatically become the alpha version? What's the charm in this story anyway?"

Estimated attendance: 30 people

Eggleton started by saying that "King Kong" was "not just a genre film." (I notice that he uses "genre" to mean "science fiction, fantasy, and horror", just as was described in the genre panel.) So why is it an enduring classic?

DeVito said it had an impressive list of firsts: first score by Max Steiner, first use of such extensive

animation, first use of various camera tricks, and so on. (This turns out to be a bit inaccurate: Max Steiner worked on at least 63 scores before "King Kong", although "King Kong" was certainly his first major score.) He added that there used to be something magical about being able to see this movie only when they showed it on television, as opposed to now, when you can see it just by popping a tape into the VCR.

Eggleton really liked the "lost world" aspect of the film. And he wanted particularly to point out that by using a series of glass paintings, with stop-motion animation between the panes, Willis O'Brien managed to give an amazing impression of depth. Kimmel described all this as creating "an illusion that only existed when the film was run through the projector," and that this was a major step in special effects and film-making.

DeVito said it was important to remember that in terms of audience reaction, "King Kong" was much bigger than either "Star Wars" or "Jurassic Park". Various people also commented on Kong as a tragic hero, rather than the frequently simplistic "monsters" of later films. DeVito thought this was partly accomplished by making his moments intentionally childlike (in terms of his coordination, head movements, and so on). Eggleton said that a couple of scenes where this is most obvious are after Kong kills the Tyrannosaurus rex, and when he is searching for Driscoll in the cave. DeVito also pointed out that Kong was not just a large gorilla--he walked upright, making him closer to human.

Leeper said that unfortunately they decided to stress this, and made "Son of Kong" too cute and the son too sympathetic. (The same thing seems to have happened in "Son of Godzilla".) Was the studio surprised, Leeper wondered, that the audience sympathized with Kong? Kimmel and Eggleton thought that the studio might have been but that Cooper and the rest of the crew were not. Kimmel added that "Mighty Joe Young" was another attempt to make a more "kid-friendly" film. (He related that when his young daughter first saw "King Kong", he had warned her that Kong dies at the end. When they got to the part where Kong is climbing the Empire State Building, she turned off the television and said, "Okay, it's time to go to bed now.")

DeVito said, "There is a charm to stop-motion that CGI will never match." And he admitted an artist's limitation when he said, "The greatest artist in the world will never match the average person's imagination." And no remake, no matter how good, could capture the originality, the glorious black-and-white photography, or the archetypal dream images of the original. Kimmel noted that there was an "individuality" in older special effects, a clear personality. In "King Kong", the special effects were Willis O'Brien's, in "Jason and the Argonauts", they were Ray Harryhausen's, and so on. They were not the result of a large crew (consisting, perhaps, of half the population of New Zealand).

Eggleton talked about some of the later "King Kong" films. There was a 1959 treatment of "King Kong Versus Prometheus" which O'Brien rejected. The studio later sold the idea to Toho as "King Kong Versus Godzilla", which ended up the biggest grosser of all the "Godzilla" films. O'Brien also got shafted on the "Lost World" remake, which used men in suits rather than stop-motion. There was a Rankin-Bass cartoon series (from which everyone remembers the song), "King Kong Escapes", and of course, the Dino Di Laurentiis remake. (Kimmel wondered whether there might not be a revival of this because of nostalgia for the World Trade Center.) There was also "Queen Kong" with Rula Lenska and Ray Fay, where Kong climbs Big Ben. (So did Konga, if I recall correctly.) There was the South Korean film "A\*P\*E", "King Kong Lives", "Mad Monster Party", and "Mighty Peking Man". I added the "Mighty Joe Young" remake, which DeVito said was best in its promising use of CGI. Kimmel said that there are a lot of pop culture uses of the images (in advertising and so on).

Kimmel said that for years Fay Wray resented that she was remembered only for that role, but eventually made her peace with it, and even titled her memoirs "On the Other Hand". (I have three degrees of separation from King Kong: my mother worked with Fay Wray in the OWI during World War II.)

I also wanted to see: The Real Middle Ages

***Everything You Know Is Wrong: SF That Questions Reality***

***Fri 4:00PM, H312***

***Jack Dann, John R. Douglas, Evelyn C. Leeper (m), Eric M. Van, Robert Charles Wilson***

*Description: "Over the years, a number of SF works have played with reality. Phil Dick wrote many novels asking what is real. The trend has accelerated recently, to the point where even wildly popular movies like The Truman Show, Pleasantville, and The Matrix are looking at similar issues. The panel discusses SF that plays with reality. What are the seminal works in this subgenre? Is it really getting more popular now? If so, why?"*

*Estimated attendance: ? people (I forgot to count)*

*(I first suggested this panel for a Boskone. And that was inspired by a posting by Mason Barge about the spate of movies, such as those mentioned above, which questioned reality in all sorts of different ways.)*

*Van introduced himself as "the biggest Dickhead" around, and who am I to argue? :-)*

*Dann wondered if alternate history should be included in this topic, but that seemed different than the notion that reality was not what you thought. (Secret histories might qualify, I suppose, but even they are on a much narrower level. So Dann's "The Memory Cathedral" might fit in.)*

*Van said that the main component of these "reality-questioning" works is the "conceptual breakthrough when the protagonist discovers the truth. He pointed out that a very early version of this would be Robert A. Heinlein's "Universe" in which (SPOILER ALERT) the protagonist discovers that his universe is actually a generation-ship in a much, much larger universe.*

*Rosemary Kirstein suggested that the fascination is that they recapitulate growing up, when you are constantly finding out that reality is not what you thought. As an example, she gave the moment when you first see your teacher at the supermarket and realize that she has a whole life outside the classroom. As Wilson said, "What we perceive of the world is only a small fraction" of reality.*

*Dann suggested that culture shock was just another aspect of this--not everyone has the same view of reality in terms of what is expected. Van said that the rate of change now is so fast, that this can occur even within a culture. And the Singularity (the Spike), if it happens, will certainly change our perceptions of reality. All of these, though, are qualitatively different than the idea that (for example) we are all just computer programs.*

*Dreams are another type of unreality, and certainly the idea of "I woke up and found it was all a dream" is not exactly new. Wilson said that a theme running through most of the works discussed was that of deception as malevolence, rather than being neutral or benevolent.*

*Panelists named various other works that "played with reality" such as "Donnie Darko" and "The Stunt Man". Wilson said that he was astonished that "The Matrix was comprehensible to a mass audience. (One could, I suppose, argue that its mere popularity does not mean the audience understood it.)*

*The panelists agreed that the notion that reality is not what it appears is fun to play with, but can be destructive if a person comes to believe that. There was also a concern that a lot of this was really "paranoia porn."*

*Jack Dann closed by suggesting that "reality is merely a bait-and-switch scam."*

*We had dinner with Kate Pott, Pete Rubinstein, and Dan Kimmel at a Thai restaurant nearby.*

*In order to eat, I had to skip: The Miyazaki Fen Don't See, and The Salvation of the Modern Novel*

***The Time Machine -- Guest Interviews and The 1953 Retro Awards***  
***Fri 8:00PM, Auditorium***  
***Bob Eggleton, William Tenn, Terry Pratchett, Jack Speer, Peter Weston***

*Description: "Take a short trip with our Guest, experiencing world past, present, and future through their eyes.... Then help celebrate the best in science fiction and fantasy from 1953 with some special commentators as we present the 1953 Retro Hugo Awards."*

*Estimated attendance: lots of people*

*In a very clever ploy to boost attendance for the Retro Hugos, the planners combined them with speeches/interviews of the Guests of Honor. The interviews were good, or would have been had I been able to understand them, but we must have been in an acoustically bad spot. While most people said they could understand everything, people who had sat near us said they had the same problem. While the interviews were good, the "humorous" skits were not.*

*During his interview of Terry Pratchett, Peter Weston referred to the (supposed) prejudice against fantasy when he told Pratchett, "All you have to do to win a Hugo is to write a science fiction novel." Pratchett inquired whether it had to be a good one. Weston said, "You couldn't write a bad novel to save your life," to which Pratchett quickly replied, "To save my life I could."*

*And the winners were:*

- | *Best Novel: "Fahrenheit 451" by Ray Bradbury*
- | *Best Novella: "A Case of Conscience" by James Blish*
- | *Best Novelette: "Earthman, Come Home" by James Blish*
- | *Best Short Story: "The Nine Billion Names of God" by Arthur C. Clarke*
- | *Best Related Book: "The Conquest of the Moon" by Wehrner Von Braun et al*
- | *Best Dramatic Presentation (Short Form): "War of the Worlds"*
- | *Best Professional Editor: John W. Campbell*
- | *Best Professional Artist: Chesley Bonestall*
- | *Best Fanzine: "Slant"*
- | *Best Fan Writer: Bob Tucker*

*Poul Anderson had four works nominated and did not win for any of them. I believe this is a record. James Blish won for the novella "A Case of Conscience"; the novel expanded from it had already won in 1959 as well. I cannot think of another case in which both a shorter and a longer version of the same story have won.*

*(All of the feature films for 1953 were under ninety minutes long, so rather than arbitrarily moving them all to "Long Form", the administrator decided to eliminate the Long Form category as not having enough entries. This is also more in keeping with what Hugo categories might have existed in 1954.)*

***Great Moments from SF Films***  
***Sat 10:00AM, H306***  
***Bob Devney (m), MaryAnn Johanson, Daniel Kimmel, Mark R. Leeper, Kathi D. Overton***

*Description: "Since "movies are moments," let's recall a few dozen of the really great ones."*

*Estimated attendance: 45 people*

*(Bob Devney managed to take a short break from his weekend-long project of editing the "First Night*

*Times" (perhaps more aptly named "The Neverending Story") to serve on this panel.)*

*The problem with at least reporting this panel is that it is basically just a list of moments. I am reminded of those records of "World's 50 Greatest Melodies", which are in turn satirized by such titles as "World's 50 Greatest Cake Frostings". In addition, it is difficult to discuss or even list these scenes with giving spoilers, but I will try.*

*Devney said that for him, the best moments were those you could not see in real life, and gave as an example Maria's transformation in "Metropolis". Johanson said for her it was the "Night on Bald Mountain" sequence in "Fantasia" (which she saw at Radio City Music Hall). Kimmel said the scene from his childhood viewing he most remembered was the scene in the sand pit in "Invaders from Mars". Leeper said two memorable scenes were that of Max Schrek rising up in "Nosferatu" (the original one), and the "re veal" in "The Fly" (again, the original) when the cloth is pulled away. Overton agreed on "Nosferatu" and said that German Expressionist films had a lot of memorable moments.*

*Johanson added the first appearance of King Kong (need I note again this is the original, not the remake?). Kimmel really liked the Woody Woodpecker cartoon in "Destination Moon". (Leeper pointed out that in the "New York Times" review of that film, the reviewer said that everyone knew the rockets wouldn't work, because they needed something to push against.)*

*Devney observed that all the scenes people mentioned were visual, which emphasized the precedence of that over dialogue as making a scene memorable (at least in science fiction or fantasy). But Devney then named a scene memorable for its words: the "Time to die" speech from "Bladerunner". Overton liked the speech in "Night of the Living Dead" about how to kill the zombies ("they're all messed up").*

*Returning to visuals, Devney added the marshmallow man in "Ghostbusters". Leeper thought the scene inside the hull of the ship in "Five Million Years to Earth" memorable.*

*Panelists thought that there were many "Lord of the Rings" moments--the Balrog, the cave troll, Minas Tirith, and the dwarves' book were all named.*

*Devney liked the scene in "Aliens" with Ripley in the loading robot. Kimmel said that that moment in "Invasion of the Body Snatchers" when Miles realizes what has happened to Becky was chilling. As far as "romantic" moments go, Leeper added the moment in "Quest for Love" when Colin calls out for an ambulance. Devney loved the scene in "The Whole Wide World" when Robert E. Howard and Novalyne Price go to the top of the hill and look out over the landscape. She says, "You can see the whole world from here," and he replies, "And others as well."*

*Kimmel pointed out the scene in "Gattaca" when she gives him the hair for the DNA check (and vice versa). (Johanson said that this idea of checking DNA for prospective partners was elaborated on in the recent science fiction film, "Code 46".) In "Gattaca", Leeper preferred the scene with the doctor at the end.*

*Johanson said that in "The Truman Show", her memorable moment was when Jim Carrey asks, "Why do you want to have a baby with me? You don't even like me." (My memorable moment from that film is more visual--the "bump" of the boat. I also really like the scene in "Dark City" when they break through the wall, and you get a camera reverse showing you where they are.)*

*Kimmel said that of course the song "Daisy" in "2001: A Space Odyssey" was a classic science fiction moment. Devney added the scene of the bone turning into the spaceship.*

*Someone mentioned the memorable use of music in Kubrick (perhaps even more memorable in "A Clockwork Orange" than in "2001"). Someone else said that "The Exorcist" had a memorable score; I would add "Planet of the Apes" as well.*

Devney liked the "Groundhog Day" wake-up scene(s) and the "stink demon" in "Spirited Away". Leeper recommended the "Dark Star" elevator sequence. He also said that the most memorable Harryhausen scenes might be those in "Jason and the Argonauts": Poseidon, Talos, and the skeletons. Kimmel liked the photograph of Thanksgiving dinner in "Lilo & Stitch" (which I have to say that I do not remember, proving all this is very subjective).

People suggested lots of scenes from the Simpsons' "Treehouse of Horror" shows, and also a lot from "Galaxy Quest". As far as animation, Kimmel liked the scenes of the comic books within "Iron Giant" and Overton found "When the Wind Blows" very memorable.

In the category of "jaw-droppers," Johanson said the first fight sequence in "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" qualified, and Leeper added the power station in "Forbidden Planet" and the visuals in "What Dreams May Come".

I also wanted to see: Doorstops: Truly Enormous Book and Series, How Does Language Influence Thought?, The Ethics of Cloning

### **Reality Ain't What It Used To Be: Secret Histories and Urban Fantasies**

**Sat 11:00AM, H302**

**Paul DiFilippo, Daniel Hatch (m), Alex Irvine, Steven Sawicki**

*Description: "Science fiction has always challenged conventional notions of reality, but recent years have seen a growing interest in speculative stories that dwell on ancient conspiracies and secret histories, parallel dimensions which interact in strange ways with our own and hidden corners of great cities in which lurk creatures of myth and legend come to life. Panelists can explore these cracks in consensual reality and their implications for the future of SF itself as a genre based largely on developments in science and technology. There are more and more books where the author, such as Tim Powers, re-examines the past and reveals the "real" secrets hidden there. Supernatural conspiracies may explain what we might have always thought of as dull historical trivia, and underlying connections between the most disparate events are elucidated with great verve. What the hell is going on here? Are secret histories gaining on alternate ones? Why are they so addictively enjoyable? How might the fantastic reinterpretation of history practiced by such authors relate to current events? And, in a world where Mae West slept with Ho Chi Minh, what even stranger connections might make intriguing reading?"*

*Estimated attendance: 70 people*

*This seems a bit similar to yesterday's reality panel, but only because the panelists on that one seemed at times to want to include secret histories as misperceived reality.*

*DiFilippo took issue with the title, saying that urban fantasies are not really secret histories. He mentioned Tim Powers's "Last Call" (which tied together two previous Powers books), but Sawicki said that although Powers's secret history is set in America, we haven't been here long enough to have a secret history. (Well, I don't know--Neil Gaiman did okay in "American Gods".)*

*DiFilippo said that secret histories are not really a new development, going back at least to 1908 and G. K. Chesterton's "The Man Who Was Thursday".*

*Irvine said that one condition of secret histories was that history cannot be violated. DiFilippo suggested that the backstory of some of Robert A. Heinlein's works (e.g., "Methuselah's Children") might constitute a secret history.*

*Unfortunately somewhere around here the panel started meandering so much that I gave up taking notes.*

*I also wanted to see: About the Sci-Fi Channel, How Much of Our Behavior Is Gene-Guided?--One Writer's Approach*

***The One Foot SF and Horror Film Reference Bookshelf***  
***Sat 12:00N, H203***  
***Bob Devney, MaryAnn Johanson (m), Daniel Kimmel, Mark R. Leeper***

*Description: "There are many film reference books, some general, some aimed specifically at genre films. The panel examines film reference books and tries to decide the truly essential ones are for a fan of SF and horror films. After all, you can't get ALL your info off the Internet or in the gutter...."*

*Estimated attendance: 15 people*

*This was basically a repeat of a panel at Boskone 40 (available at [http://fanac.org/Other\\_Cons/Boskone/b40-rpt.html#shelf](http://fanac.org/Other_Cons/Boskone/b40-rpt.html#shelf). And because I am so far behind in this write-up, and my notes do not really indicate any major changes, I'll just suggest that you look at that description.*

*I also wanted to see: Is All This Labeling Necessary?, Children's Play in the Future*

***The Next Fifty Years: Where Will the Next Big Things Come From?***  
***Sat 1:00PM, H304***  
***Gregory Benford, John G. Cramer, Thomas A. Easton (m), Larry Niven***

*Description: "In December 2003, the Sunday New York Times identified 'some developments today that could have profound effects tomorrow ... the causes of the next big things.' These included a growing elderly population in developed nations; unanticipated epidemics; pressures on democracy from religious fundamentalism and the campaign against terrorism; the Internet and the rise of movement politics; high tech warfare; and the spread of global capitalism. What wild cards and longer-term trends should be added to this list? With what consequences? Leading SF authors are invited to explore key factors expected to shape society over the next fifty years."*

*Estimated attendance: 200 people*

*Introducing himself, Larry Niven said, "Writing is my only employment. I'm a bum."*

*Easton asked whether this panel was futile, in the sense of asking how much of the twentieth century could have been forecast in 1954? Benford said that no one could have predicted the war on terror or Britney Spears.*

*As a side note when a panelist said that technology moved too fast to predict, he asked how many people in the audience still had their slide rules. Over a hundred people raised their hands. (We still have four or five.)*

*Cramer predicted plagues and militias, and a rising tide of surveillance. Benford said that the latter was a permanent feature of advanced societies, and Niven opined, "I always thought privacy was a passing fad."*

*Niven also said that some things that might happen, such as a giant meteorite strike or contact with extra-terrestrials, was inherently unpredictable. (But what about global warming?)*

*Benford said that he does not believe in the Singularity.*

*Cramer predicted quantum computing would become more important. Easton said that there were a*

lot of developments coming in nanotech and biotech. Benford thought that environmental problems would take center stage, and that we would learn to manage the world (planet). Easton said that sounded like an impossible task, but "we still manage things where you can't see all the moving parts--have you raised children?" (I feel obliged to observe that "Can we manage the system?" is not answered by "We have to.")

[I had to leave early from this panel.]

I also wanted to see: *Technological Cusp Points and Alternate Histories* (but it was too crowded); *Tradeoffs between Freedom, Security, and Privacy*.

### ***If Rome Never Fell ...***

**Sat 2:00PM, H311**

***Esther Friesner, Mark L. Olson (m), Susan Shwartz, Robert Silverberg, Harry Turtledove***

*Description: "Imagine ... two millennia of Roman rule ... Rome continues to fascinate writers. There have been a number of novels set in Ancient Rome, including several popular mystery series. Rome has been the setting for a number of popular fantasies. And a number of science fiction books have based their societies loosely (or not so loosely) on that of Rome. The panel looks at the continuing lure of the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire."*

*Estimated attendance: 150 people*

*Silverberg began by claiming, "We're still living in Rome, basically." Turtledove agreed somewhat, saying that there was definitely a cultural continuity, but not a political one. Shwartz said that we still use mostly Roman architecture for our public buildings, and that road-building began as a Roman trait. Friesner said that had there not been a Rome, there would have been no spread of Christianity. (This, however, is more the converse of the topic.)*

*(Worth noting, perhaps, is that what he had here was four Jews (and one Christian) talking about the Roman Catholic Church as the "valid" church, and the Eastern branches as heresies.)*

*Silverberg suggested that he got a series of stories by subtracting Christianity in order to have Rome survive, though he did this by making the Exodus fail). This resulted in a secular state with no waste of resources on religion. (Turtledove noted that he had made Mohammed into a Christian saint in his stories.)*

*Olson said that he felt that in most alternate history stories, too much remains the same. In actual fact, after two generations, none of the same characters should remain. Silverberg said that his complaint was that many stories in which Rome survives show it as identical in the twentieth century (or calendar) as it was two thousand years ago. In a long span of time, he pointed out, "there had better be some evolution in the system." He also noted that Republican titles and offices continued in the Empire, meaning that because of the strong devotion to tradition, there was more apparent stasis than actually existed. So Rome "would have sustained the outward skeletons of its structures," even as those structures evolved.*

*Turtledove said that an example of a story lacking evolution was Kirk Mitchell's "Procurator", which has an industrialized Rome but with the same social structure as Augustan times. (He did not name it, but his description was the same as previous panels when he has named it.) It also apparently had an Emperor Constantine in the fourth century, which is completely unlikely. Turtledove suggested that had Rome never fallen, we would be reading "The Rise and Ascent of the Roman Empire by Edward Gibbon".*

*Olson said that when you talk about Rome in fiction, you get two kinds of stories: alternate histories and war stories. Turtledove said there are also time travel stories, and Friesner thought that one also*

*finds Arthurian stories. Regarding the war stories, Olson asked, "Why is the Roman army so much more fascinating than any other?" to which Silverberg immediately replied, "It was better." Silverberg also added, "The story of Rome was the story of armies," and, "They were good warriors; they were good administrators."*

*Turtledove said way back there was an argument at Cal Tech by people who claimed that the Roman army could wipe out all the armies of Middle Earth, and that his "Visdessos" series derived from this idea.*

*There was a lot of discussion about Rome, but little speculation on what might have happened had it not fallen. And I had to leave early for my next panel.*

*I also wanted to see: Lies I Learned at the Movies (it was too crowded), Whatever Became of the Space Merchants?, Alternate Prehistory, The Well Read Fan*

***Alternate History Challenge Match  
Sat 3:00PM, H305***

***Michael Dobson, Mitchell Freedman, Evelyn C. Leeper, S. M. Stirling, Toni Weisskopf (m)***

*Description: "Panelists get a weird alternate present, and have to reverse-engineer how it came about ...."*

*Estimated attendance: 70 people*

*The room was absolutely packed for this. I have no idea why.*

*This is very hard for me to write up, first by the very nature of the panel, and second because I was on it. Weisskopf asked people in the audience to shout out ideas for alternate presents for the panelists to work with. But rather than take each one separately, she would often combine three or four into one present.*

*For example, the first "exercise" was Uruguay rules the world. Flynn had a scenario involving Aaron Burr. Stirling had something involving Richard Nixon. My suggestion was that the various liberators in South America in the 19th century united to form a single stable country on that continent.*

*The second scenario was that the only people allowed to vote are only women who know calculus. Stirling had Joan of Arc as the key person here, but Flynn said he would go back to the monotheism and have that overthrown, possibly ending up with a female goddess rather than a male god, and Sarah as the main religious figure.*

*The third was that England was the 52nd state and we speak Hebrew. I pointed out that Benjamin Franklin had actually suggested Hebrew as the official language of the United States, so one could probably derive something from that. Stirling had the Mormons as the driving force. Flynn suggested that if Jesus had led a successful revolution this might have happened, but someone in the audience said we would more likely be speaking Aramaic. (Or possibly Greek.) (But not Latin, recent movies notwithstanding.)*

*Other scenarios included pyramids on the moon, the Great Pumpkin is real (someone suggested that a sighting of Elvis in an orange jumpsuit would serve for this one!), or the first man on the moon is Australian (Stephen Dedman already did this in "A Greater Vision").*

***The Numinous in Science Fiction and Fantasy  
Sat 4:00PM, H302***

***Lois McMaster Bujold, James Macdonald (m), Farah Mendelsohn, James Morrow, Deborah Ross***

*Description: "Okay, we know that "numinous" isn't a noun, but there is something, well, noun-like in the way some authors can invoke a feeling about stuff beyond our everyday experience. But the numinous does seem to show up more in our genre than in most others. Why? Why can some authors do this so effortlessly, while others try to get us there and don't quite make it? (And it is so often missed!) And why would a bunch of rational, science oriented people care about that kind of thing in the first place? Is this because SF is at its roots interested in the same things as fantasy and fantasy has a particularly close relationship with the numinous, or is it just that the numinous is a great way to get a Sensawonder fix?"*

*Estimated attendance: 200 people*

*The panel began by defining "numinous" as "filled with spirit".*

*Morrow said that he writes a lot of religious satire, adding "I'm an old-fashioned humanist for whom the world is sufficient." He talked about jellyfish and other natural phenomena, and declared, "That's all I need of God."*

*Ross said that there are many aspects of the numinous: symbol, myth, archetype, deeper resonance, transcendence.... She quoted Abraham Herschel as having said, "For a miracle to happen there are only three things required: a soul, a moment, and God." However, she asked, "Since all three are always available, why are there not more miracles?"*

*MacDonald said that he had written a mystery with fourteen chapters to match the Stations of the Cross, which "refutes the Manichaeian heresy" and has all seven sacraments.*

*Morrow said that he wrote his "Towing Jehovah" series in response to C. S. Lewis's "Mere Christianity". Even Lewis, he pointed out, later wrote "A Grief Observed" in response to "Mere Christianity". Morrow also felt that the word "spirituality" has been very over-used and abused lately.*

*Mendelsohn said that the numinous was to some extent the fantasy equivalent of "sense of wonder", for example, in John Crowley's "Little, Big". (I would say that it is a sense of wonder in the book that is not necessarily accurate to life, which would separate it from "spirituality".)*

*Bujold said that the numinous was an emotional reaction inside someone's head. Religion is full of stories, but she wonders why we have these reactions at all.*

*(Again, I had to leave early for the Sidewise Awards presentation.)*

*I also wanted to see: Elizabethan English as a Second Language*

***The Sidewise Award  
Sat 5:00PM, H301  
Evelyn C. Leeper, Steven H. Silver***

*Description: "On this timeline, at least, the Sidewise Award for Alternate History was established in 1995 to recognize the best stories and novels of the year in that subgenre. See you there, when and if."*

*Estimated attendance: 40 people*

*The short list for the Short Form was:*

- 1 De la Casa and Romero: "The Day We Went Through the Transition"*
- 1 Landis, Geoffrey: "The Eyes of America"*
- 1 O'Connell, Robert L: "The Cuban Missile Crisis: Second Holocaust"*

- | Roberson, Chris: "O One"
- | Silverberg, Robert: "The Reign of Terror"

*The winner was Roberson's "O One". Roberson seemed genuinely surprised by this, and given that his competition included Geoffrey Landis and Robert Silverberg, that is perhaps to be expected. (I remember a few years ago when the finalists were two stories by Silverberg and a story in translation from Alain Bergeron, a Quebecois author basically unknown in the United States. He was really surprised when he won, as was the person he sent to represent him at the ceremony.)*

*The short list for the Long form was:*

- | Davies, Murray: "Collaborator"
- | Freedman, Mitchell: "Disturbance of Fate"
- | Kirwan, Larry: "Liverpool Fantasy"
- | Stirling, S.M.: "Conquistador"

*The winner was Davies's "Collaborator".*

**The Hugo Awards**  
**Sat 8:00PM, Auditorium**  
**Neil Gaiman, William Tenn, Terry Pratchett, Jack Speer, Peter Weston**

*Description: "Bestowing the most famous honor in science fiction, the Hugo ceremony is indeed The Big One. Come watch some of our most towering talents endure hours of squirm in hopes of one magnificent minute of squeal."*

*Neil Gaiman began by making a request that there be no bad language in the acceptance speeches (a reference to his own "F\*\*k, I got a Hugo!" two years ago). Robert Silverberg, the only person known to have attended all the Hugo ceremonies, gave a short speech recounting some of the highlights. In 1953, the banquet associated with the ceremony cost \$5.75. In 1968, the ceremony took a record five hours. He said he had lost two Hugos at conventions at which he was the Toastmaster, and three the year he was Guest of Honor. In 1983, the banquet was a crab feast and mallets were given to the diners--which they used before and during the ceremony as noisemakers.*

*It was definitely Filthy Pierre's (Erwin Strauss's) night: he won both the Big Heart Award and a Special Committee Award for his work as musician and facilitator (he invented the voodoo board, designed and built the freebie racks, and hands out party sheets every night).*

*And the winners were:*

- | Best Novel: "Paladin of Souls" by Lois McMaster Bujold
- | Best Novella: "The Cookie Monster" by Vernor Vinge
- | Best Novelette: "Legions in Time" by Michael Swanwick
- | Best Short Story: "A Study in Emerald" by Neil Gaiman
- | Best Related Book: "The Chesley Awards for Science Fiction and Fantasy Art: A Retrospective" by John Grant, Elizabeth L. Humphrey, and Pamela D. Scoville
- | Best Professional Editor: Gardner Dozois
- | Best Professional Artist: Bob Eggleton
- | Best Dramatic Presentation, Long Form: "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King"
- | Best Dramatic Presentation, Short Form: Gollum's Acceptance Speech at the 2003 MTV Movie Awards
- | Best Semi-Prozine: "Locus"
- | Best Fanzine: "Emerald City"
- | Best Fan Writer: Dave Langford
- | Best Fan Artist: Frank Wu

*I am sure when the fans spent years splitting the Dramatic Presentation into two categories, it was not so that "Lord of the the Rings" could win both!*

*Lois McMaster Bujold is now tied with Robert A. Heinlein for number of Hugos won for novels, at four each. Heinlein won for "Double Star", "Starship Troopers", "Stranger in a Strange Land", and "The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress". Bujold won for "The Vor Game", "Barrayar", "Mirror Dance", and "Paladin of Souls". Each also has four non-winning nominations. Heinlein was nominated but didn't win for "Have Spacesuit--Will Travel", "Glory Road", "Time Enough for Love", and "Job: A Comedy of Justice". Bujold was nominated but didn't win for "Falling Free", "Memory", "A Civil Campaign", and "The Curse of Chalion". Heinlein does, however, have a slight edge in also having a Retro Hugo for "Farmer in the Sky".*

### **Fanzine Lounge**

*I spent a couple of hours staffing the Fanzine Lounge Sunday morning, not the most active time (although one person did come in and buy \$80 worth of fanzines!)*

### **The Human Cloning Wars Sun 1:00PM, H206**

**Daniel Abraham (m), Bridget Coila, Herb Kauderer, Mary H. Rosenblum, Samuel Scheiner**

*Description: "Success with cloning mammals makes it look as if human cloning may be possible. The first steps toward human cloning have been reported. The battle lines are already drawn on how far to go. Opinions range from the Raelians who say everybody must get cloned, to religious conservatives who want cloning banned. But the real debate is about the perils and promises of reproductive and therapeutic cloning. What's the difference? How does it matter to us? What's likely to change? Will cloning lead to human organ farms for spare parts? What are some of the emerging ethical concerns about this biotechnology? How can they be addressed?"*

*Estimated attendance: 30 people*

*Scheiner (who has a Ph.D. in this stuff) gave a definition of cloning as "the reproduction of genetically identical individuals." This includes parthenogenesis. No mammals or birds do this naturally, though other animals do. The technological approach is to take the nucleus from a normal cell and "stick it into the egg cell." Coila later pointed out that the egg also provides mitochondrial DNA, so true clones would need the source for the egg and the cell providing the nucleus to be the same.*

*Rosenblum said in a sense this was artificial twinning, and Abraham noted that twins are "folks with the same genomes but different folks." Kauderer said that there was a strong drive by some for this as a reproductive technology, and thought that when this happened, there would be the same fuss as there used to be "test tube babies"--with the same ultimate result.*

*Coila said that the problem was that too many people think that a clone of themselves would be like a twin. Abraham added that we are not talking about doppelgangers, cloned memories, or anything like that. Rosenblum said that the clones of animals we have generated have different coloration than their parents, meaning that clones are even less like twins. (A lot of this is apparently due to the prenatal environment.)*

*Rosenblum said that there was also a fear that people would clone for body parts, but Scheiner pointed out that for adult replacement parts, the person would need to grow the embryo all the way to an adult. Coila thought, though, that one could take stem cells from the embryo and implant them in (for example) the liver of the adult where they would grow new liver cells.*

*Kauderer said, "The issue of sentience is very important." Also, unintended consequences often*

outweigh the intended ones. As an example of this, Abraham pointed out that pre-natal testing to determine possible birth defects has become a method of sex selection for infants in China and India. Scheiner said that this sort of sex selection is a self-correcting phenomenon (but this is not at all clear to me).

Abraham asked about the evolutionary consequences of cloning. Scheiner said that one must distinguish between genotype and phenotype, and environment matters, both in and out of the womb. He referred to an almost Lamarckian genetic imprinting.

Someone in the audience asked about the idea of cloning armies or athletes. Rosenblum said that military traits are not inherited, and Abraham said that it was both inefficient and uneconomical to clone armies or athletes. Kauderer said that what the army wants more of are strategists, not "grunts." "Grunts" are easy to get. Coila pointed out that an army of clones would be a monoculture very susceptible to viruses (especially targeted viruses). Scheiner added that cloning would not be suitable for colonization ships because you would want genetic diversity at the far end.

People asked about therapeutic cloning, the legal rights of clones, and who would own the genetic information in own genes (i.e., could someone else take one of your cells and create a clone of you without your permission?).

On the latter, Scheiner said one guideline was that you currently cannot patent a human being.

Abraham said that in a lot of cases it is hard to separate cloning and genetic engineering issues.

Someone asked, "What if 'less than perfect' people want to clone themselves?" Coila pointed out that currently we do not prevent people from reproducing even if they are "less than perfect". (And of course, we're all less than perfect.)

One legal question (in terms of inheritance law, for example) might be whether clones are siblings or offspring.

Scheiner took a cheap shot when he said of cloning and other genetic engineering, "Humans certainly an infinite capacity for weirdness--as demonstrated by Worldcons." He also said that this desire for cloning will last only about fifteen years, until the first clones become teenagers.

Someone asked, "If the embryo is 'ensouled' at conception, and there is no conception per se, when does the soul enter (if at all)?" Scheiner said that the Roman Catholic Church's doctrine is that souls are unique and cannot be twinned. Therefore, he said, ensoulment cannot happen until after the eighth (or so) division when twinning can no longer occur." But someone in the audience suggested that since God would know that there would be twins, He could have implanted both souls in the original embryo. Rosenblum said to ask Mike Moscoe; he might know.

Daniel Abraham mentioned the theft of a relic purported to be Jesus's foreskin, and said he was worried about "the whole Jurassic Park-Jesus thing. 'We're missing this part--let's use a frog.' This is not good."

Someone asked about premature aging in clones. Coila thought that the problems might be more methodological than real, and more in some species than others. And Kauderer said that the issue of telomere decay was a whole separate panel.

I also wanted to see: *The Tropes of H.P. Lovecraft*

***Lonely Planet: The Extinction of Everybody But Us***  
***Sun 3:00PM, H101***  
***M. M. Buckner, D. Douglas Fratz (m), Samuel Scheiner, Pat York***

*Description: "It's estimated that the familiar banana (a monoclonal variety known as the cavendish) will disappear from global shelves within a decade. One SF writer/marine biologist (Peter Watts) says he hopes his successors like squids and jellyfish, because in 50 years they'll be the only marine life left. Are we about to experience big bad changes in our biosphere, or are we alarmed over nothing? An exploration of many questions exploring the deficits or dividends of genetic diversity (past, present, and future!)"*

*Estimated attendance: 45 people*

*Fratz said that this topic is also called "The Sixth Extinction". But he pointed out then when we talk about extinctions, we need to distinguish between ecosystem diversity, species diversity, and genetic diversity. "Biodiversity" encompasses all these things. And the only two environmental issues of concern are public health and biodiversity.*

*[The first five extinctions were at the ends of the Ordovician (440 MYA, 20-50% families died out), the Devonian (360 MYA, 20-30%), the Permian (250 MYA, 50%), the Triassic (213 MYA, 20-35%), and the Cretaceous (66 MYA, 15%).]*

*Scheiner said that there are three processes affecting biodiversity: habitat destruction, climate change, and global mixing. Regarding climate change, Scheiner noted that not only is the rate of change faster now than before, but also that species can no longer migrate to new territories as they used to do. (This applies mostly to larger species--I suspect cockroaches can still migrate.)*

*York sees the Sixth Extinction as inevitable, but believes the planet will survive (as an ecosystem) even if humans do not. Fratz, on the other hand, feels that we have enough genetic understanding to reverse the Sixth Extinction, but that we must preserve both the ecosystem and information from the various biosystems. Scheiner said that all this extinction is not going to do all that much damage; we could probably lose half the species without causing the ecosystem to fail. (He recommended "Win-Win Ecology" by Michael Rosenzweig.) He also said that the term "biophilia" has been applied to those who feel that we must preserve every species. York said these were possible, but that "we will be okay" is only a best-case scenario.*

*Fratz said that this best-case scenario required both knowledge and money, and also a decreasing human population. Buckner sees hope in decentralization and the various grass-roots movements.*

*Someone suggested that we have really been in the Sixth Extinction since the Ice Ages. Scheiner said that there was a Pleistocene extinction of mega-fauna 10,000 to 12,000 years ago. (What killed the mammoths--kill, chill, or ill?)*

*Scheiner said that we have recently lost 90% of the biomass of big fish. Frantz felt, however, that once fishing goes down, these will come back, and re-iterated that the key to it all is to stabilize the world population somewhere well below the current level. Buckner said that projections are that the population will reach ten billion by 2050. Frantz said that it would never get that high, but that the peak might be eight billion.*

*Scheiner said that part of the problem is uneven population distribution, and that from an ecological viewpoint (North America) should be bringing in lots of immigrants from tropical regions. One factor to consider, he said, is that species in the tropics have much smaller ranges. Buckner added that we, however, use more resources than anyone else.*

*I also wanted to see: Twentieth-Century Utopian SF: Huxley and Orwell and Wells.*

***Jewish Time-Based Mitzvoth in a Lunar Colony  
Sun 4:00PM, H101  
Nomi Burstein (m), Solomon Davidoff, Janice Gelb***

*Description: "Jews have found ways to adapt ancient laws to modern and future ideas, from time travel (across the International Dateline, at least) to vampirism (yes, you are permitted to swallow some blood). So, nu? How does someone observe a time-based commandment when "day" and "night" are artificial concepts. Where will a naturally-flowing spring come from for a mikvah on Mars? Our panel of mavens will engage in pilpul on halachic and non-halachic issues."*

*Estimated attendance: 60 people*

*(Dan Kimmel was supposed to be here, but was scheduled for so many panels, he had developed laryngitis by this point.)*

*Daidoff said that one of his hobbies was collecting science-fictional kippot (yarmulkes, skullcaps). Burstein, talking about the need for translating terms, "I was trying to find an English word for 'minyan'." "Minyan," several audience members responded.*

*Gelb talked about the difficulties of working on a convention while observing Shabbos. "I've trained the staff to answer the phone," she said.*

*Regarding the question of time-based mitzvot. Davidoff said that there are two possibilities: use Jerusalem time, or calculate equivalent times locally. (I would think that using Jerusalem time would fail at great enough distances that the question of simultaneity would arise.)*

*Burstein said that in general there are three standard answers when you ask a rabbi a question: 1) Use Jerusalem time. 2) No, it's trefe. 3) Dip it in the mikveh.*

*Gelb also recommended a web site for this, then later apologized--she had forgotten that it was in Hebrew! (for those who can read Hebrew, it was <http://www.hebrewbooks.org/pdf/haadamalhayarayach.pdf>.) She said that the Chief Rabbi in Jerusalem had in fact ruled that time-based mitzvot cannot be performed on the moon, but this seemed to be a minority opinion based on the phrase "your days on the earth", which appears in the commandments. As a matter of practice, the astronauts follow "home time," which she said for the shuttle astronauts is Houston time. Someone later asked about Mir with half from Florida and half from Russia, and Gelb said that the "home-time" ruling may apply only to individuals or groups all of whom come from the same place.*

*Burstein said that a further complication was that for mitzvot which refer to "an hour", this is not a sixty-minute hour, but one-twelfth of the daylight hours at that time. So what if there is no sunrise or sunset? Burstein said that this problem occurs north of the Arctic Circle (and near the South Pole), and people there go by their home town time if they are there sort-term, while for longer periods, they draw a vertical line to the first Jewish community directly south (north) of them and use their time. (This seems to be the majority opinion).*

*Gelb suggested that the new halachic day starts when the sun is lowest (or rather, closest to the horizon).*

*Burstein said that there are a lot of questions about traveling across time zones even on earth. The first answer is that if you are planning to travel at such a time that you will be affecting your perception of fast days or holidays, don't do it if you can avoid it. But after that there are many opinions (go by your watch, use Jerusalem time, etc.). As Burstein summarized, "We can be practical, we can be goofy, and we can be goofily practical." The basic rule seems to be, "If you can avoid doing it, don't do it."*

*(As an example of the goofy part, she said that one is allowed to filter water on Shabbos only if you would drink it unfiltered! That is because if you would drink only filtered water, you consider the filtering as separating things, which is prohibited, but if you would drink unfiltered water you don't*

*consider it as separating.)*

*She raised another question. Because one is not allowed to board a vessel on Shabbos, if you land on the moon on Shabbos, can you get off the LEM and then get back on?*

*Burstein asked about Mars--does one use a Martian day or a 24-hour day? (Based on her earlier statement about the definition of hour, I would assume one would use a Martian day.) Davidoff said that in general one should use the local day. However, since one is forbidden from fasting so as to injure oneself, if the day were too long, the fasting problem would be self-correcting.*

*On the moon, one also certainly has the question how one would determine the new moon or the full moon. On Mars, which moon would one use? I asked this, and Burstein said this was a question from someone who "was really ingrained in halachah or had too much time on their hands." The answer would be to use Deimos--Phobos goes too fast.*

*Burstein said that they have a rabbi "who is sympathetic to questions like these," so her husband Michael can get informed opinions for his fiction. For example, one could build a mikveh (ritual bath) on Mars by melting the polar ice, and could use a twenty-five-hour day.*

*Burstein pointed out that a colony (or even a longtime temporary settlement) on Mars that did this would get out of sync with Earth fairly quickly.*

*Someone asked about a seder in space--should you open the door for Elijah? Davidoff immediately said, "I've got an answer." First, you are forbidden to do anything endangering your health. But you could certainly open the outer hatch, wait, then close that and open the inner hatch.*

*Someone asked about "gravity-based mitzvot". Burstein thought that shaking the lulav might be a problem in space. Davidoff said that you could build a sukkah, but Burstein pointed out that you are not allowed to fasten the top down, and it would end up drifting off.*

*Gelb said that it is amazing that the answers to a lot of these questions are "This has actually been dealt with." For example, there are rulings regarding androgynous creatures (since that occurs here), and there is a six-hundred-year-old book that says that space creatures cannot be converted.*

*Other bits and pieces:*

*If you are on a spaceship, you don't have to light Chanukah candles because you are alone and no one outside would see them. (Someone in the audience asked, "How do you know you're alone?")*

*You must hear "Amen" directly for it to count, so you cannot assemble a minyan over the radio. (What about ten Jewish men standing in a circle on the moon, but in spacesuits so that they can only hear each other through radios?)*

*Regarding whether one is allowed to teleport using a stable wormhole on Shabbos or whether that violates the prohibition on traveling more than a certain distance, someone said their rabbi told them it was alright because, "You're not traveling; you're just going."*

*Someone in the audience suggested that since women do not need to observe time-based mitzvot, the solution is to have only women as astronauts. (This is not quite true--they must fast on fast days, and observe Shabbos, for example.)*

*Gelb closed by saying, "The coolest thing is that people are actually thinking about this stuff."*

*I also wanted to see: Philosophy and SF, Alternate Law, The Next Plague, 1984+20: Dystopia*

*Past/Present/Future*

***The Masquerade  
Sun 8:30PM, Auditorium  
Susan de Guardiola***

*Estimated attendance: lots of people*

*We sat in the balcony, and the acoustics were better, but the high percentage of Discworld costumes became repetitive, and the long delay between the children's masquerade and the main masquerade (caused by using the same judges for both) was filled with some very lame humor. Cheryl Morgan, in "Emerald City" has a lot more to say about the masquerade if you're interested.*

*I also wanted to see: Warping the Classics, 19th Century Influence on 21st Century Writing*

***Alternate Holocausts  
Mon 12:00N, H311  
Michael A. Burstein (m), Evelyn C. Leeper, Susan Shwartz***

*Description: "Why is this timeline different from all other timelines? There have been some works that have explored Jewish alternate history, such as Poul Anderson's 'In the House of Sorrows' and Robert Silverberg's 'To the Promised Land.' There have also been many potential turning points that could be explored - 'What if the Maccabees succeeded in their revolt?' or 'What if the Roman Empire adopted Judaism as the official religion?' The panel looks at Jewish alternate history, with special attention to the holocaust."*

*Estimated attendance: 40 people*

*[Again, taking notes while participating on a panel is not easy.]*

*I noted that trying to do alternate Holocausts was a dangerous trap. If you try to write something like Stephen Fry's "Making History" which says, in effect, "This is, alas, the best of all possible worlds," then you can end up looking like you are justifying or excusing the Shoah. (It is sort of like stories in which you have Judas not betray Jesus, so he doesn't get crucified and Christianity never gets started. Christians may well think you're justifying Judas.)*

*There were a few peripheral suggestions (e.g., Raoul Wallenberg not disappearing but remaining as a continuing force in the force). I suggested a more drastic alternate Holocaust--a large asteroid hits the Middle East three thousand years ago. A more thorough Black Plague in Europe would have resulted in an entirely Sephardic Judaism.*

*The topic tended to drift to more general alternate Jewish histories, touching on Sabbatai Zvi, the York pogrom, and so on. Someone suggested an earlier Zionist movement to Africa (which Burstein dubbed "Eretz Uganda"), and apparently Michael Chabon has a similar idea with Alaska ("The Yiddish Policemen's Union", not yet published). Someone else thought we might have a Judaism-centered world if Rome had adopted Judaism as the official religion. (Not very likely, I think.)*

*One person asked about the idea that Germany might have been forced to give up part of its territory after World War II for a Jewish homeland, but I think the conclusion was that few Jews would want to live there.*

*Someone suggested that the Dreyfuss affair in France could conceivably have led to a holocaust there. However, as someone else observed that most of the Shoah deaths were not in Germany, but a Dreyfuss backlash would probably be contained within France.*

*Another suggestion of a turning point was the loss of the Six-Day War.*

*I will close by recommending Martin Gidron's "The Broken Wing", an alternate Shoah (or lack thereof) that won the Sidewise Award for Alternate History.*

### ***The Abuse of Biology in SF***

***Mon 1:00PM, H306***

***Perrienne Lurie, Samuel Scheiner (m), Ronald Taylor, W. A. Thomasson***

*Description: "How does SF stack up when it deals with the biological sciences? Grievous errors, and how writers might avoid them. Bad examples and good examples."*

*Estimated attendance: 40 people*

*The panelists started out with their favorite bad biology in science fiction. Taylor said his was the way in "Star Trek" all species can interbreed with humans. Lurie picked "Star Trek" again, but for the specific episode in which there was "reverse evolution" and Berkeley seemed to have evolved from a spider.*

*Scheiner picked a literary faux pas: in the appendix to "Dune" Herbert describes what is in effect a perpetual motion machine--the sandworms' diet is entirely other sandworms! He also said there were too many books in which there is only one ecosystem per planet. Thomasson objected to people being used for replacement parts instead of using vat-grown parts, which would be easier, cheaper, and safer.*

*And Lurie added another literary complaint (again about evolution), saying, "[Rob Sawyer] thinks he's an expert in evolution and he gets it all wrong." For starters, he said, Homo sapiens sapiens would not find Homo neanderthal attractive, nor would there be any attraction in the other direction either. Thomasson cited another biological unlikelihood in Sawyer: the evolution to a hive mind in "Coalecent".*

*Scheiner said that a mistake people make is to apply an evolutionary principle to only one species. He mentioned "Darwin's Radio", which he said was a good book except for the basic premise that in stressful situations, quiescent genes will create "quantum evolution". Why, he asked, is the 21st century more stressful than the life of a hunter-gatherer? But according to Scheiner, Bear apparently believes all this. Lurie later said that one thing authors seem to forget is that "most of evolution is luck."*

*Thomasson complained about aliens that are either incredibly humanoid, or obviously based on a specific Earth species. Lurie observed that if we disallowed all this, "It wouldn't be science fiction, it would be science." She added that it is hard to make "alien aliens" truly sympathetic or even understandable as characters. One approach is to have an alien alien, but make everything in its surroundings entirely Earth-like.*

*Taylor said another annoying abuse of biology was the idea that some species or individuals possess great mental powers. Scheiner agreed, saying that a lot of this notion came from the belief that we use only a small percent of our brain. But it turns out that we do in fact use most of our brain (though it's not clear how).*

*Scheiner said that in general Joan Slonczewski's works are good, but has some works with intelligent microbes. Scheiner explained that this was a problem because, "They're not complex enough to have thoughts that are complicated." To which Lurie added, "What microbes are?" Lurie also said, "A lot of biological science fiction is sociological science fiction with a biological hook, which is okay if the hook isn't stupid." One additional problem is that these intelligent microbes talk and act just like people. Slonczewski also has organisms with wheels (which have pretty much been proved to be*

*biologically impossible).*

*Thomasson said that for all the concern about tissue-matching, authors still have replacement parts working across genders, which is certainly going to cause a major genetic mismatch. An audience member cited the vats in "A Gift from Earth", but noted that at most authors wanted to explore ethics, not science.*

*Another audience member pointed out that we still cannot communicate with cetaceans (whales, dolphins, etc.) which are at least Earth mammals, but the characters (almost) always manage to establish communication very quickly in a first contact situation.*

*Asked about good biology in science fiction, Taylor cited Thomas Easton's works. Lurie re-iterated that in general Slonczewski's works are good. She also recommended Nancy Kress's "Beggars" series (but see Kress's comments about the science in her science fiction on the "Two Cultures" panel above!).*

*Lurie also said that "Babylon 5" had "some really good stuff but still got it wrong." For starters, everyone seemed to be a specialist in everything. "In reality, Dr. Franklin would have had his license revoked after operating on that kid" against its parents' wishes. Also, the plague that killed the Markavs killed every one of them, and Lurie said that "nothing is 100%."*

*Thomasson thought that James Patrick Kelly usually got it right, and that Donald Kingsbury's "Courtship" was "fuzzy in places but basically valid.". Scheiner named Paul A. McAuley's "The Secret of Life" and Kim Stanley Robinson's "Forty Signs of Rain". Taylor suggested Sir Arthur C. Clarke's "The Deep Range" and much of Octavia Butler's work.*

*Lurie mentioned in Doc Smith's works that one could indeed replace oxygen with chlorine in designing an alien species, but the aliens then could not do all the atmosphere replacement necessary to make any sort of planetary conquest reasonable. She also mentioned a John Brunner story, "Good with Rice", about a delicious plant that causes sterility.*

*Returning to bad science, Scheiner said that Vonda McIntyre's "Dreamsnake" has protagonists who "finally discover" that there are three sexes needed for reproduction in some species. "You never have more than two," he said. (There are a lot of reasons for this, but the sheer unwieldiness of having a third is high among them.) Isaac Asimov's "The Gods Themselves" sort of had three, but the third was used only as the womb.*

*Thomasson suggested that Poul Anderson had an interesting idea in "Fire Time" in which life at the poles of a planet was seeded from elsewhere with di-amino acids (sp?), so you end up with two totally independent food chains.*

*I also wanted to see: The Trouble with Trailers*

**When Fans Die....  
Mon 2:00PM, H307  
Andrew Porter, Mike Resnick, Joe Siclari (m)**

*Description: "...what happens to their stuff? It's depressing, but true. All of us have heard stories about a fan whose family executor, not knowing the value of his collection, threw it out upon his death. How do we prepare for the dispensation of our collections when we head for the Great Convention in the Sky? Sell it, even though it would break our hearts? Do we leave it to a library or university - however, won't they need an endowment to take care of it? It might end up sitting and rotting in the basement, until the books are sold for peanuts! Do we donate it to a fannish organization, to use as they wish to advance SF? What are other alternatives? What are the advantages/disadvantages/practicality of each?"*

*Estimated attendance: 30 people*

*Resnick is currently involved in helping several fans (or fans' widows) sell collections on eBay. Porter is selling his own collection. Siclari is trying to collect materials for the Fan History Project.*

*This led to a bit of a conflict. Siclari was a bit late, so Resnick told the story of selling an early fanzine for someone on eBay and getting \$60 for it. Siclari apparently objected to selling off such items of fan history, saying that they should remain in fans' hands, to which Resnick responded, "If you're not a fan, why are you paying \$60 for a mimeo fanzine?" (As I said, Siclari was late, and could not respond.) Porter started with the obvious: "You can't take it with you." He then proceeded to tactfully note that (if you have a collection), "If you don't have a will, you're a total f\*\*king a\*\*hole."*

*An audience member said that a letter of wishes, separate from your will, could be used to explain how to get the most value out of your collection--whom to contact to sell the artwork, for example.*

*If you are going to sell your collection (or someone is going to sell it for you), you need to know its value. Resnick said that a basic reference work was Lloyd Currey's bibliography of first editions, now available on CD-ROM).*

*Resnick said that it takes time to get the best value when selling a collection. Even with the "good stuff" (such as Heinlein first editions), he got only 50% sell-through for the first auction, and 25% for the second.*

*Siclari said that for artwork, eBay is your best bet, but he could also suggest some agents. (Contact him if you are interested.) Timing matters a lot in any case. Siclari said that was one reason that Sam Moskowitz's collection did better than Forry Ackerman's collection.*

*Siclari said you also need to think about insurance and contents coverage, especially if you are not a home-owner. If you are a home-owner and have home-owner's coverage, you may want to get an art rider (or floater) in addition.*

*Siclari warned about donating the material to libraries. Once you give it away, you have no control over their disposition. (Stories were told about people donating Arkham House first editions to libraries, which then stamped them with labels on them, put them on the shelves--and they were all "missing" within a year. If you donate a lot of materials, you will almost definitely have to donate money to help support it. Siclari recommends an endowment instead of a one-time grant, because you can specify that the endowment will last as long as they maintain the collection. But if they dispose of the collection, or do not maintain it as your executor thinks they should, the money will stop. This encourages them to follow your wishes.*

*I also wanted to see: Deep Time, After the Fall*

### **Miscellaneous**

*Not much left to say after all this time. One idea for a panel I thought of for future conventions was "Films for Engineers".*

*Nippon 2007 won the bid for 2007. I was in favor of them, though a bit skeptical of their abilities to communicate with non-Japanese fans regarding concerns about costs and such. (It was not until very close to the vote that they actually started to respond to questions about hotel costs, and even that was more in terms of quoting the costs for packages and for the main hotel, rather than a range of hotels.) However, it turns out that between our godson's bar mitzvah ceremony and the Toronto International Film Festival, we probably will not be able to attend--the first Worldcon we will miss since Aussiecon Two in 1985.*

*(And on the Worldcon front, Interaction opened their hotel booking the weekend of the Worldcon, a rather odd timing. Apparently the Progress Reports announcing this arrived Wednesday or so, after we had left home, and so when we booked at their table, the two main hotels were already full!)*

*My apologies for taking so long to finish this. A large chunk of it was written at the Toyota dealership in November while our car was being serviced, so I guess that makes them a sponsor of sorts.*

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[Return to Index](#)

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