

NOREASCON III NOTES

I awaited the arrival of Noreascon III with anticipation for several reasons. First, I have made many business trips to Boston since my company headquarters, main research lab, and pilot plants are located in the area. This would be, however, the first time that I would be able to bring Corlis along with me. I have spent many evenings exploring downtown Boston, and I was anxious to introduce Corlis and others to the city. Second, I have gotten to know the Boston fans fairly well in the past few years, and I knew that the convention would be well organized, if somewhat impersonal. Of course, there are always little surprises awaiting an undertaking of the size of Noreascon, but I knew just how much thought and energy had gone into the planning. Third, I was anxious to run out first Nashville in '94 Bid Party at a Worldcon. We had some fairly fancy plans for props and party themes, and I was really curious to see how those ideas were recieved.

Corlis and I arrived on Wednesday night and took the T to the Marriott where we were staying. While the Marriott was not part of the Noreascon hotel block, Dick Spelman had arranged for a block of rooms there at a very good price for those of us collecting Marriott points. I noticed that there were quite a few fans who had also arranged to stay there, but there was a really wierd feeling staying at the Marriott. Since there were only 10% of the rooms taken by fans, the rest of the crowd was mundanes, mostly a bunch of teenagers from the Armenian Youth Foundation. Running into a fan in the elevatios of the Marroitt was like runing into a friend in an airport. The hotel showed no signs of hosting a SF group, and was filled with fashionable and trendy yuppie types with big hair, and runing into the occasional familiar face was almost a feeling of Deja-vu.

The Noreascon Committee offered a function room in the Hynes for a bid party. We planned to use the room as a glorified bid table with some food and drinks. One of the ideas we had to fill the room was to build a train in the room. For several years the convention committees in Kentucky and Tennessee have formed a loose organization we call the L&N. We have has several "train parties" where we would take adjacent rooms in a hotel and "link" them together as cars in the party train. The Louisville room would be for Rivercon, the Bowling Green car would be for Concave, and the Nashville car for Kubla, ect. From these parties came such concepts as Swill, the Wigwam Village DSC bid, and the L&N DSC. For the room in Boston, I arranged to have three huge cardboard boxes and a fiberboard 55-gallon drum shipped to the lab in Lexington, MA which we would turn into an engine, flat car, and caboose with cloth, marking pens, duct tape, and lots of immagination. Corlis and I worked round-the-clock on Thursday to build the thing. When we were done, It looked really great, but the room where the Noreascon people had put us was so remote that NOBODY was coming there. We promptly closed the room, moved the train behind the table in the ConCourse, and stashed the catered food provided by Noreascon for a room party.

Time out for a few words about the Hynes Auditorium and Convention Center, and ARA Services. The Rennovated Hynes in an extrodinarily

imposing, monolithic, and cheerless edifice. It brings to mind buildings in which one might visit the IRS to be audited. It is entirely done in black and grey marble with huge staircases and massive hallways. There are few obstructions to break the line of sight which creates an oppressive atmosphere such that I expected to hear the music from "Brazil" somewhere in the background. To reinforce this feeling the ceiling of the second floor area that comprised the Concourse (a poor substitute for a consuite) and the huxter room was covered with open ductwork. All they needed was some guys in red coveralls and a Central Services logo to complete the scene. Instead they had ARA Services. ALL food taken into the Hynes had to be bought through ARA. When the Boston Committee offered the Nashville bid \$1600 toward food services, we thought that would go a long way toward supplying a party in the Hynes room. Guess again monopoly breath! One can of coke bought from ARA cost \$1.50 according to their pricelist. What the pricelist doesn't say that in addition to that there is an 18% surcharge added, plus 5% Massachusetts sales tax on top--bringing the cost of one can of soda to \$1.86! At those prices the \$1600 donation from MCFI would pay for about one hour of bid party if you had any turnout at all! We quickly said goodbye to the Hynes and moved to a suite in the Sheraton which cost a mere \$300 a night for our bid parties.

The first night of the Nashville bid partying was Thursday night. A brisk business was done in pre-supports, and I got to see many of my friends for the first time during the Worldcon while handing out Lynchburg lemonade. The Thursday night party was not very elaborate since most of the organizers had only arrived in Boston that day. Nevertheless, I got to meet several of the SFPANs I was looking forward to seeing (Hi JoAnn, Gary, Hank, Dick, Ned, Janice, Ect...), and the party was the place where a SFPA dinner was planned. I was glad that such neophytes as Corlis and I were invited to join the outing, but that's another story.

On Friday morning Corlis and I actually attended some programming! This was, inevitably, the business meeting. There was enough amusement in the meeting to make it worthwhile. All of the significant business passed on from Nolacon was voted down, so there were no changes in the Worldcon site selection procedures. The closest vote was one to extend the site selection lead time to four years in advance. If that passed, then both the Nashville and Atlanta bids would have been voted in Chicago. I can't say what that would have done to us, but it failed so we'll never know. The funniest moment came when Don Eastlake made a tremendous Freudian slip. When debate questioned the effect of a business item on the 1993 race, Don came back with the answer that the outcome of the vote would have no effect because the 1993 ballot was already fixed. It took some time to regain order at this point.

The demands of bidding for the worldcon heavily cut down on the amount of Worldcon that I got to do. Except for the Hugo ceremony and the business meeting, I didn't get to see anything else of the programming at Noreascon. We did, however, get to see a fair sampling of Boston. There were several things that I absolutely wanted Corlis to see, and for the most part we saw them. First, of course, were the old standbys, Faneuil Hall, Boston Common, Fenway Park, Harvard and MIT, and the T. On Saturday I found that I hadn't packed enough clothing, and we had to go to Filene's Basement. I didn't actually have to drag Corlis away, but we came back with significantly more clothing than

left Kentucky.

In sum, Noreascon III lived up to my expectations. I came away with a load of books, met many folks I had wanted to meet, played around in Boston, and never ate at the same place twice. While this year's Worldcon was not very "user friendly", it was strong in the areas I expected strength. The staff of the Hynes Convention Center and the Boston Sheraton are best summed up in T-shirt slogan I saw someone wearing. It said "Welcome to Boston--Now go home." It should be interesting to see if the Bostonians will have the courage to bid for n=4 in 1998. The most memorable moments of the con for me were (in no particular order) Don Eastlake's "the 1993 ballot is fixed", setting up the train in the Sunday night Nashville party, Mike Resnick winning a Hugo, the Armenian Youth doing a native dance in the 13th floor elevator lobby of the Marriott at 4:22 a.m., and the New York in '93 party. All told, a successful trip.

GOOD STUFF

BOOKS: One reason to look forward to Worldcon as Christmas in September is the Huxter Room, because there one can find stuff that simply can't be found elsewhere. I drug home about a dozen books and have spent the last month devouring them. Here are some of the results.

SOURCERY by Terry Pratchett--If you have missed Terry Pratchett's discworld stories to date, please rectify the matter. This is humor much in the same vein as the Hitchhiker's Guide books, only crazier. The setting for the books is the Discworld, which rests on the back of four huge elephants who are in turn perched on the back of A'Tuin, the Star Turtle, "in a distant and second hand set of dimensions, in an" astral plane that was never meant to fly". If you can make it through one of these books without cracking a smile, let alone a guffaw, then you should look into acquiring a sense of humor. I hear that Sears has them on sale. The books to date are The Colour of Magic, The Light Fantastic, Equal Rites, and Mort. In the UK, however, there are three more which haven't made it across the Big Pond yet, so there's plenty more where those came from.

THE STRESS OF HER REGARD by Tim Powers, and THE EMPIRE OF FEAR by Brian Stableford--are both similar in theme. Both concern vampirism in the old world. I really enjoy explorations of vampirism, especially Anne Rice's books, so I am always interested in new entries in the field. In Empire, Atilla, the Hun was a vampire, and the Roman Empire was done in not by barbarians, but vampires. In the 17th century the rule of the vampire race is absolute. Common humans act as cattle and lovers for the thirsty and sterile vampires. While the vampires cannot reproduce sexually, male vampires can make new recruits from the ranks of the common people. The actual mechanism of transformation is a closely guarded secret, but the discovery of the microscope brings some scholarly commoners close to the answer. Noell Corderly is the commoner son of a scientist who is a lover of one of the noble vampire ladies. The father's discoveries mark him for death, but he passes some of his knowledge along to his son before he destroys his vampiric lover by infecting himself with plague. Noell eventually flees to Africa where he and some colleagues undertake a perilous trip to the interior of the continent in an attempt to steal the ultimate secret

of vampirism. The action of the book is full of swordfights, pirate ships, bloody rituals, sex, and mystery. The book qualifies as SF despite its setting in the 1600's and its horrific subject due to the ultimately scientific explanation for the rise of the vampires. The ending is somewhat wishful thinking, and overly lectury, but getting there is lots of fun as the central mystery unravels one thread at a time. As far as I know the book has only been published in England, and I had to buy the British edition at an inflated price, but keep your eyes open for an eventual American printing.

Tin Powers has almost singlehandedly invented the "Steam punk" branch of SF to which Stableford's Empire of Fear is a new entry. As opposed to the cyberpunks, steam punk plays with historical eras where instead of mad scientists we have mad Natural Philosophers. The Stress of Her Regard continues in the vein Powers began mining with The Anubis Gates and On Stranger Tides. In Stress Powers reveals that Lord Byron, John Keats, and Percy Bysshe Shelley were all somewhat willing victims of an elder race of beings known as nephelim. These beings are seen in the book only by their manifestations, but they are sort of vampirish ghosts who will "marry" a mortal they feel worthy. They can also be created as stony embryos to either male or female humans.

On the stormy eve of his wedding, Dr. Michael Crawford places his wedding ring on the finger of a statue to prevent its loss while he rescues a friend from the storm. When he goes to retrieve the ring he finds that the statue's hand has closed around the ring, and he has unwittingly married one of the nephelim. On the morning after his wedding Crawford wakes to the horribly mutilated corpse of his human wife, and is hounded out of England as a murderer. Taking refuge in Switzerland, Crawford falls in with Lord Byron, the Shelleys, and John Keats and learns something about the being which has chosen to haunt him. Thus begins a roller-coaster ride through 19th century Europe, and most of that period's greatest poets. It seems that while the nephelim take their price in blood, they open the creative portals of the human mind, and host becomes a font of great literature. The Strass of Her Regard will dazzle you with action while sending you to the library to research the lives of 19th century English poets. Before reading the book, I had never thought of Percy Shelley and Lord Byron as men of action.

Also recommended:

The Adventures of Conrad Stargard by Leo Frankowski--A 20th century engineer has an accident with a time machine and is sent back to 13th century Poland. He knows enough history to realize that Poland will be in the way of the Mongol Horde in 10 years, so he sets out to create an military-industrial complex in Poland circa 1231. Lots of fun, but rather amateurish handling of male-female relationships. The adventures are published in four volumes which are now on the shelves so you won't have to wait six months between installments like me.

The Drive-In by Joe Lansdale--A multiplex drive-in theater in Texas is kidnapped during the Friday night horror sextuple feature. The aliens seem to be making a low budget horror film of their own by trapping the moviegoers and watching what happens when the popcorn runs out. The book is messy, kinda funny, and prettu gross, just like a low budget horror film. Catch also The Drive-In 2: Not Just One of Them Sequels.

MAILING COMMENTS

ALAIN: I'm glad to hear that you finally got on full time at Vandy. I'm sure that having health insurance with Liam coming along is a real relief. Sounds like your move was one of those charming learning experiences that life occasionally throws at you. Where is Sharondale Drive? I've driven around most of Nashville, but I can't place that street name. Just when I thought we had adsorben all of Corlis' possessions into the house, her mother bought a house and presented us with all of the stuff she had been holding at the old house. We now have a back bedroom filled with miscellaneous stuff again. I NEVER want to move from this house unless it is to a bigger house and someone else does the moving.

Tiffany's problems sound like those my section head's wife went through a few years ago. She staarted having horrible headaches and was losing her vision. She is a doctor, and went through all of the Nashville doctors without finding anything wrong. She even went to the Mayo Clinis, for tomography with no results. She then became pregnant with their second kid, and the headaches went away. Once he was born they returned. They finally figured that it was her estrogen balance that was causing the headaches. She just went on the pill to fool her body into thinking it was pregnant, and the headaches have gone away.

Gee, there is only a 7 year differential between you and Tiffany. Corlis and I have 11 years between us! She wasn't even BORN when Kennedy was shot. Still, the difference does come in handy now and then. Since she is so yojng and innocent, I can teach her all of my bad habits, and she never even knows that there are other ways to doing things.

ROCKY: Ain't it a crock how they calculate eligibility for financial aid. Your current income disqualifies you for FA, but when you quit your job and return to school, youe income drops to zero, and you a re qualified for money! You have to starve through a whole year and live on savings until you can reapply as a pauper for aid. Of course, they just don't hand out Fairness Certificates with a birth certificate, so what can you do? Corlis, by the way, claims that SHE recieved a document at birth which guarantees her fairness, but if she shows it to me it will disappear. I'm still somewhat sceptical.

Carils and Naomi certainly have a talent for expecting constant entertainment. On weekends, Corlis will blurt out something like "I'm bored--Entertain me!" I have tried to suggest driving to Gnashville and catching some of the tourist sites and museums. But no! That's not exciting enough. So, what do you think that she and Naomi do week before last? They head off to Cheekwood for the day leaving me to work on the car and abuse this keyboard. Where's that fairness certificate just when I need it?

NIKKI: Ah, yes. Laurence of Arabia. I had little hope that it would play in this area since Gnashville is totally commercial in the theater selections of movies. I rejoiced when I heard that the reconstructed Laurence was playing at the Bellemeade theater. This is the last of Nashville's great movie palaces, and has the largest screen in the

state. The theater chain keeps it open just so they can point to it and show it off. Anyhow, Corlis, Naomi, Pat, Rocky, and several other fen went to see it after the annual Bheer Bust and Bash at Khen's house a few weeks ago. It was worth the wait, but I must say that I drank lots of Coke during the four hour running of the film.

That's about all I have time for this ish. I am including an article I wrote for Tony Ubellhor's Sour Grapes issue of Pulsar!. Tony asked for an article explaining the Australian Ballot system. This is what he got.

UGLY
BLANK
SPACE

THE NAKED TRUTH *
PART 1: HUGO VOTE COUNTING EXPLAINED
By Gary R. Robe

In a Democratic society the system used for vote counting is a major concern. In the United States, for example, many people suppose that the system for determining the President is straightforward: the candidate with the most votes wins. Yet as we learned in High School civics, the actual determination of the President comes through the elaborate Electoral College system which makes it theoretically possible for a candidate with less than a majority to win the election depending upon which states are carried! There is often grumbling among Science Fiction fans that the system used to determine the recipient of the Hugo(1) brand Science Fiction Achievement Awards(2) is too complex. To that I say balderdash! This is simply a manifestation of fannish laziness--they simply haven't taken the time to learn the system. Once a few simple rules are understood, then the outcome of the vote count is as predictable as Hugo(3). One must keep in mind that it is, however, a system: the application of a set of rules to manipulate a data set. Once the last vote is cast, then the correct application of the rules will inevitably produce an invariant outcome.

First, let's get some terms straight. To begin, the name of the system used to award the Hugos(4) is the Sequential Preferential Balloting System. Banish forever the meaningless phrase "Australian" from your vocabulary! Just because our friends "downunder" use a similar system for their political elections is not cause for us to misapply the term to our system. Besides the title "Australian Ballot" almost sounds friendly--bringing to mind Crocodile Dundee saying something like "Gday mite! Lets nip off to the pub for a Fosters." The Sequential Preferential Ballot System(5) sounds much colder and scholarly--making you sound much more intelligent, and intimidating a listener enough to discourage questions you might have to answer. Next, the ballot is a sheet of paper listing the nominees with a space in which to indicate a preference. The sequence is the order in which a voter ranks the various nominees in a category. These are the features which define the system.

The first phase of the determination is the casting of votes. In this phase the voter casts his(6) votes for the nominees in the order of his preference. The traditional ballot offers five nominees plus a "no award" in each category, but this number may be changed at the discretion of the presiding committee. The voter need not vote for all nominees, and can rate "no award" at any place in the ranking. Indeed a ballot which placed "no award" in first for all categories, and no further rankings is perfectly admissable but rather cynical. The voter's part in the procedure is complete with the return of the ballot to the presiding authority. This is where our fun begins.

* (PLUS SOME BALD LIES)

- 1) The award, not the storm.
- 2) A service mark of the World Science Fiction Society--an unincorporated literary society.
- 3) The storm, not the award.
- 4) You should have the idea by now.
- 5) Hereafter abbreviated SPBS.
- 6) We are, after all, adopting the sexist conventions of scholarly writing here.

Rule No. 1 of the SPBS is the winner in a category will have a majority of the votes cast. The simplest case is one in which nominee X has 51% of the first place votes. In this case nominee X automatically gets the rocket statue. In a six man race (remember no award and footnote 6), however, it takes overwhelming popularity to achieve a win on the first count. At this point one might be tempted to use the stairstep method(7) of vote counting, but have faith, we do have more rules here to guide us.

Rule No. 2 of the SPBS is if no nominee in a category has a majority of first place votes, then discount the votes for the nominee with the fewest first place votes, and add in the dropped item's second place votes as first place votes. The application of rule 2 is the reduction of the field to a five man race, and a weighting of the vote structure to factor in the influence of second-place votes. Perhaps an example would clarify the situation. Consider the following hypothetical slate for Best Novel, and votes cast:

Robots at the Dawn of Foundation's Empire Edge by Isaac Asimauve

1st:317 2nd:220 3rd:296 4th:278 5th:92 6th:65

Endless Game by Mison Some Cards

1st:186 2nd:254 3rd:176 4th:204 5th:166 6th:2

Chanur's Eleabath by C.J. Cherryhh

1st:169 2nd:204 3rd:416 4th:27 5th:109 6th:165

2003 14159 Odyssey Pi by Arthur C. Clarkekent

1st:116 2nd:149 3rd:314 4th:159 5th:666 6th:77

The Brookstones of Sha-na-na by Terry B. L. Books

1st:10 2nd:22 3rd:72 4th:21 5th:67 6th:234

No Award

1st:59 2nd:65 3rd:92 4th:91 5th:124 6th:777

As we can see, none of the nominees has a majority of first place votes, so we must apply rule no. 2. Terry Books drops out of the race as only the 10 people who nominated it voted for The Brookstones of Sha-na-na. By eliminating those votes, and adding the second place votes of the dropped contender, we see that a majority has still not been reached.

Here comes Rule No. 3 which says if rule 2 does not produce a winner, then repeat the process until an item attains a majority. By repeated application of rule no. 3 we clearly see that Robots at the Dawn of Foundation's Empire Edge attains a majority after the fifth elimination. That determines who gets the rocket, but what about those getting the shaft? I knew you would ask, so to determine the ranking of the rest of the nominees, one must apply Rule No. 4.

7) A favorite of teachers. Throw the papers down a stairwell. Those that travel farthest get the highest grades.

This is where many people stop understanding the process, but it is really simple. Rule No. 4 states to determine the placement of candidate "X", drop the votes for the winner of place N-1, and count its Nth place votes as votes for place N-1. Then repeat the elimination procedure as described in Rule 3. This means the nominee with the second most first place votes does not become the second place winner, or even the leader in the second place race. Returning to the above example and applying Rule 4 the following ranking soon established:

1st place: Robots at the Dawn of Foundation's Empire Edge
2nd place: 2003 14159 Udessey Pi
3rd place: Chanur's Eleabath
4th place: Endless Game
5th place: No Award
6th place: The Brookstones of Sha-Na-Na

The interest in the final ranking is, of course, the total humiliation of the poor schumck who came in after No Award. All the others can say that the honor of being nominated was enough for them, and breathe a sigh of relief that they didn't finish last.

There are certainly some exceptions to these rules, and some variations which prevail in the awards related to the Hugos bear mentioning. The newest of these is the little known Rule No. 5 which states if after the application of Rules 1-3 the outcome of the vote is still not satisfactory to the administrators, the offending ballots are declared to be block votes and are discarded. This rule certainly simplifies the vote counting procedure, but its use is still in some dispute. The situation will not be improved in the 1990 vote due to a simultaneous mailing of ballots from a group of Kentucky, Indiana, and Tennessee fans nominating PULSAR! for best fanzine.

Several variations on the rules of the SPBS are found throughout fandom. The most notable of these is the Financial Influential Ballot System (FIBS) used to determine the recipients of the Hogu Awards for Dubious Achievements in Science Fiction. In this quaint system, a voice vote is taken, and the winner is determined by which candidate earns the most bribe money for the committee. Another widely used system is the Temporal Denial Ballot System by which many con committee chairmen are chosen. This is often called the "Not Me!" system as the voting is begun with the question "Who is it going to be this year?". The nominees all loudly respond "Not Me!", and the one who speaks last is elected. This method highly favors candidates who have gone to the restroom or are not attending the concom meeting.

It is hoped that this article has achieved its purpose in clarifying the vote counting procedure for the Sequential Preferential Ballot System. Indeed, we have seen that the application of a few simple rules, and the use of a few hours of CPU time on a Cray 2 make the outcome of the vote obvious. Readers desiring coverage of the topic in greater depth as is possible here are referred to the October issue of Locus magazine for a vote-by-vote breakdown of this year's Hugo voting. Any resemblance between titles and writers in this article and actual works or authors living or dead is probably intentional, but it is hoped that it is funny. Furthermore if situations described herein are uncomfortably close to reality for some, remember that no names have been used. Next time we will attack the thorny issue of fanzine production values with a hard-hitting investigative report that asks the question: Mimeo vs. Desktop Publishing--Threat or Menace?