

I've been a fan of John Varley for almost twenty years, particularly of his shorter works. His short stories, such as "Press Enter" and "Persistence of Vision", were dizzyingly creative, and yet plausible, looks at what if? (e.g., What if

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people could buy customized bodies as easily as we can buy customized automobiles?). His longer work, though, was generally verbose and dull. After a promising first book, his "Titan" trilogy quickly bogged down, and his award-winning novelette, "Millenium," suffered when when expanded into a novel. I had my doubts that Varley could sustain the creativity and pacing of his shorter works. With his new book, S_t_e_e_l_B_e_a_c_h, Varley proves he can write an outstanding novel.

Many years in the future, humanity has colonized the Moon and (by implication) several other satellites or planets in the Solar System. Earth has been lost, however, decades ago when essentially-omnipotent aliens landed and eliminated all human life. These aliens do not further affect the humans off-Earth, but the loss of the planet has scarred the psyches of the survivors. In Luna, the colony on the moon, lives Hildy Johnson, an ace reporter for one of Luna's most respected newspapers, a sleazy tabloid. Hildy lives in a near-paradise; people live virtually forever, science has cured most physical ailments from cancer to bad breath, and the Central Computer keeps the climate comfortable and is available to talk to people or otherwise entertain them. Although there is a vaguely capitalistic economy, one's needs are easily satisfied. You can even change your sex if you're bored with your present one.

Hildy's not happy, though. In fact, he's rather depressed, and survives several suicide attempts only through the prompt action of the benevolent and ever-monitoring Central Computer. Hildy talks to the Computer (on several levels), and learns that he's not unique; other people are increasingly feeling anxiety, stress, and suicidal impulses. In fact, the Central Computer admits it itself has been feeling rather depressed lately... Meanwhile, Hildy comes across a bunch of "anarchists" who have their own vision of where the human race should be going.

It's a tense roller-coaster of a ride, full of exotic characters, imaginative situations, and believable extrapolations. Varley excels at taking us into an environment quite different from our own, but within our grasp because that environment is a plausible and detailed extension of human society and psychology. In this book, Varley wrestles with the big questions, such as "What makes Life worth Living?" as well as lesser questions such as "What if a cult made Elvis Presley a saint?" S_t_e_e_l_B_e_a_c_h has already been nominated for a Nebula, and I'm sure it will also be nominated for a Hugo. It deserves both nominations, and quite possibly is the best book published last year. [-jrrt]

2. From the Department of "The More Things Change the More They Stay the Same, Only Different": I cannot help but notice how old plots are being seen in new lights. John Ford made his Westerns in which the cavalry was pitted against the Indians. In about two-

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thirds of these films the bad guys were the Indians. Occasionally Ford would throw in a plot where the real bad guy was the commander of the fort (n_e_v_e_r played by John Wayne) who just did not understand the tenuous relations between the cavalry and the Indians and messes them up. Then of course the Indians spring like a mousetrap. Today the political climate is different but what really has happened is that the political pendulum has swung from one extreme to the another. Any reasonable reading of history tells you there were a lot of times the Euros were wrong, some times the Indians were wrong, and a whole lot of times when either there was more than enough blame to go around or you just cannot tell.

Then there were a bunch of films of the variety "Boy meets girl. Boy likes Girl. Girl does not like Boy. Boy is persistent. Girl still does not like Boy. Boy is more persistent. Girl falls for Boy. Boy gets Girl." That was the plot of T_h_e_G_r_a_d_u_a_t_e. Mike Nichols's film was considered to run counter to the establishment of the 1960s. But for a lot of different reasons it is even more counter to today's establishment.

What makes me think of all this is that I see a made-for-TV movie

coming up called I_C_a_n_M_a_k_e_Y_o_u_L_o_v_e_M_e. Sounds like an old-fashioned love story, doesn't it? But the subtitle is "The Stalking of Laura Black." The description is, "A Silicon Valley engineer cannot escape from a co-worker who has become obsessed with her." It sure sounds a lot like the plot of T_h_e_G_r_a_d_u_a_t_e, doesn't it? But it is just slightly different in tone.

If you made T_h_e_G_r_a_d_u_a_t_e today it would have to end with Elaine Robinson shooting Benjamin Braddock. Benjamin gets up. Elaine pushes Benjamin under the bus. Bellowing, Benjamin gets up. Police arrive with guns. Bus is hit by stray bullet and explodes. Toasted Benjamin drags himself out of the flames, cries, "Elaine!", and dies. Happy ending. Roll the credits for six and a half minutes.

3. REMINDER: Hugo nomination ballots must be postmarked by March 31, 1993, and reach the convention by April 6, 1993.

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There is much to be said in favor of modern journalism.
By giving us the opinions of the uneducated, it keeps us
in touch with the ignorance of the community.

- Oscar Wilde

ISAAC ASIMOV'S CALIBAN by Roger MacBride Allen
Ace, ISBN 0-441-09079-6, 1993, \$9.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Although this is called I_s_a_a_c_A_s_i_m_o_v's_C_a_l_i_b_a_n (and A_s_i_m_o_v's_C_a_l_i_b_a_n on the spine, though merely C_a_l_i_b_a_n on the page preceding the title page) and was written "with his cooperation," one suspects

Asimov's involvement was limited to authorizing Allen to write this and to approving the general story line. Still, Allen has kept many Asimov trademarks: the female roboticist, the police robot, the apparent violation of the Three Laws, and so on.

Unfortunately, he's also kept the too-simple mystery: I figured out "who-dun-it" well before the police. Also, the whole sub-plot of the secret affair seems more in keeping with Asimov's attitudes toward sex than any consistent set of societal mores. In fact, another similarity to Asimov's style is that although the story takes place "untold thousands of years" in the future, everything seems very much like today. For example, the police force and police work are structured exactly as now. But our police procedure has certainly changed from that of thousands or even hundreds years ago.

Allen has added his own contributions: a deeper discussion of the Three Laws than Asimov ever attempted (though hardly the "searing examination" the back cover promises) and a somewhat topical ecological theme, as well as other current issues, thinly veiled. The result is not optimal: Allen's attempts to examine issues are blocked by the necessity to write in Asimov's style, but the issues remind us we're not reading an Asimov novel anyway.

Allen is a good writer in his own right. I would rather see him writing his own books than trying to shoehorn his style into an Asimov copy.

MY TOP TEN FILMS OF 1992
A film article by Mark R. Leeper
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1. **LORENZO'S OIL:** How did two parents with no medical background find a cure for the previously terminal disease that afflicted their son? You actually will understand, step by step in this true story part intellectual puzzle, part political statement about the medical community, part story of a family medical tragedy. We need more films like this. Rating: +3
2. **THE CRYING GAME:** An IRA kidnapping leads to a chain of events that keeps both the characters and the audience guessing. **MONA LISA** director Neil Jordan has equaled or surpassed that film in one of the best movies of the year. Rating +3. See it before someone spoils it for you.
3. **GLENGARRY GLEN ROSS:** Little more than just a filmed stage play, but a very compelling one. David Mamet's play is a tense story of people caught up in the real estate game. The play is both suspenseful and at the same time makes a bitter piece of social commentary. See this one just for the sheer joy of hearing rich and powerful dialog. Rating +3. Rating: +3
4. **FAR AND AWAY:** A really big film with impressive historical sweep. The sort of epic storytelling that films do so well and just have not done very often in recent years. Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman star in a story of Irish immigrants coming to the Irish slums of Boston and then to the Oklahoma land rush just about one century ago. This is the most enjoyable film I have seen in 1992. Rating: low +3.
5. **UNFORGIVEN:** A film to debunk most of the myths in other Western gunfighter films. Perhaps Eastwood made **UNFORGIVEN** as an act of contrition for glorifying violence in so many of his previous pictures. In any case, this is a very adult and intelligent Western about myth and reality. Rating: high +2.
6. **THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS:** Michael Mann's **LAST OF THE MOHICANS** is finally available and while James Fenimore Cooper might cavil, this is still a film that teaches a lot about a little-dramatized chapter of history. In some ways it is more intriguing in concept than the source novel. Technical credits are good across the board including remarkable stylistic restraint coming from Mann. Rating: high +2.
7. **PRELUDE TO A KISS:** Romance, comedy, fantasy, and even a little softcore horror combine in an intelligent and thoroughly

enjoyable film. PRELUDE handles an old idea, but at the same time says a lot about life and human relationships. Even the acting by minor characters is good. (This is one of those films whose actual premise comes as a surprise well into the film. I will be very vague below rather than spoil the plot.)

Rating: high +2.

8. DEAD AHEAD: Some subjects are just intrinsically difficult to adapt to film. There were no human deaths and little visually spectacular in the Exxon Valdez disaster. There WAS a lot of political fighting in the wake of the disaster with a large number of players. DEAD AHEAD compares favorably with films that had similar obstacles such as ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN. This HBO-BBC co-production is remarkably compelling watching. Rating: high +2.
9. HOWARD'S END: One of the best, indeed probably the best, of the recent run of film's based on E. M. Forster's novels. It takes a long time before the audience knows for sure where this story is going, then it turns out to be a story that is subtle and complex. Very good performances all around. Rating: +2.
10. ENCHANTED APRIL: This is a light and VERY pleasant comedy that could be used as an ad for the Italian Tourism Board. It starts like E. M. Forster's indignant social dramas and then unwinds under the warm Italian sun into a rich romantic comedy. It features beautiful settings and people you would love to meet. Rating: +2.

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(Part 2 of 3)
Con report by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Short Science Fiction: The Cutting Edge

Saturday, noon

Sheila Williams (mod), James Patrick Kelly, Steven Popkes,
Darrell Schweitzer, Connie Willis

People as usual promoted their latest books. Willis said the new collection of her short fiction, I_m_p_o_s_s_i_b_l_e_T_h_i_n_g_s, would be coming out in December, at which time F_i_r_e_W_a_t_c_h would also be re-issued. (This, by the way, explains why someone thought Willis had a collection called A_r_t_i_f_i_c_i_a_l_T_h_i_n_g_s, which is actually a Karen

Joy

Fowler collection which had originally been titled T_h_e_L_a_k_e_I_s_F_u_l_l_o_f_A_r_t_i_f_i_c_i_a_l_T_h_i_n_g_s.)

Regarding the "cutting edge," someone quoted George Bernard Shaw as saying, "Everything changes but the avant garde." While the panelists talked mostly about the "cutting edge" of science fiction in terms of cyberpunk et al, I thought the title of the panel mean that short fiction w_a_s the cutting edge of science fiction. (I certainly find it easier to find Hugo nominees among the short stories than among the novels; in fact, it seems the longer the stories get, the harder it is to find Hugo nominees.) Williams

seemed to think that rather than being the cutting edge, most of what she gets for A s i m o v ' s S c i e n c e F i c t i o n is the "cutting sponge," by which I assume she means it just soaks up whatever ideas are hanging around. Kelly thought the whole idea of the cutting edge was somewhat anti-artistic in that once a cutting edge has been declared, it silences dissent.

Going back to older ideas of the avant garde, the "New Wave," and the cutting edge, Schweitzer said that Barry Malzberg felt that the golden age of science fiction was from 1948-1955 because that was when ground-breaking work was done. On the whole, though, the panelists agreed that trends and movements were dangerous and counter-productive, not only because they silence dissent, but because they lead to too much "copy-cat-ism." As one panelist said, "Unique voices don't fit into a history of science fiction." (This person had been talking to an academic who was teaching a course on the history of science fiction and mentioned that R. A. Lafferty [I believe] was not included. The response was that Lafferty didn't start any trends and influenced no specific authors in any noticeable fashion, so he was irrelevant to the course.)

Secular humanism was described by Willis as "decaying decorations on an already moldy wedding cake of literature." (I'm not sure what that means, but it sounds great.) Most of science

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fiction seems to be in the direction of "minor works by junior authors," franchise works, and general land-fill material. Where are the great "patterning works" the panel mentioned: H. Rider

Haggard's S h e, Bram Stoker's D r a c u l a, J. R. R. Tolkien's L o r d o f t h e R i n g s? (My guess is they're scheduled for next year's Boskone's "Neglected Authors" track--after all, two years ago they did Jules Verne.)

Luckily, there is hope. Magazines are forced to buy fiction from new writers to survive, so there is a chance to see new, fresh fiction. This is why short fiction is the cutting edge, I guess. (I might claim the golden age of short stories is now, in fact.) What they are seeing could be described as the "Third Wave" of

cyberpunk. The First Wave was William Gibson's *Neuromancer*. The Second Wave was all the rip-offs that came out of that. The Third Wave are the works which deal with the use of real-world technology from authors like Greg Egan, Alex Jablokov, Jonathan Lethem, and Vernor Vinge. Schweitzer pointed out in this context that John Varley's *Stehel Beach*, for example, is full of matter-of-fact sex, technology, and genetic engineering that would have made the book revolutionary in 1968. (The sex alone would have gotten it bounced by a number of publishers.) Now, it's considered "straightforward" science fiction--nothing ground-breaking. And the "ground-breaking" works of the 1960s were all copies of literary ground-breakers that had gone before: John Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar* was the child of John dos Passos's work; Brian W. Aldiss's *Barrefoot* is heavily influenced by James Joyce. Still, Williams emphasized that "the best authors have their own voice." While any author will be influenced by other literature, good authors try to set trends rather than follow them, try to write their own works instead of copying others. Willis agreed, saying that this was what kept the science fiction field fresh while other genres stagnate: "Romances imploded into a neutron star; science fiction is like a blob that keeps growing." (Someone noted that the fastest growing sub-genre in romances is the time-travel romance.)

Willis also observed that the new voice is what can revive an ailing field. "An author like a Stephen King can come along and rejuvenate a dead and decaying [!] field."

Brief mention was made of short fiction for children. Most markets for this are very unreasonable regarding republication rights (according to Schweitzer, who thought only *Children's Book Market* was a worthwhile market to sell short children's fiction to). Because of the limited number of outlets, few authors find it worthwhile to write a children's story that they can send to only one or two publications, and have no chance of resale income.

Asked what were the problem areas in science fiction today, Schweitzer said he was tired of the proliferation of "elfy-welfy" fantasy. Willis attacked "horrible, ghastly 82-volume trilogies."

There is no dearth of stories per se, but often it seems that the bad drives out the good. Schweitzer closed by saying that "90% of today's science fiction wouldn't have been published in 1940." (Of course, a lot of it couldn't have been written then either.)

SF Origami
Saturday, 1 PM
Mark R. Leeper

I didn't attend this, but I did look in and see that there were about twenty people folding origami. In fact, Mark got asked to come to the con suite Saturday night and teach some more, and ended up spending another couple of hours there.

Responsibility and the Arts
Saturday, 2 PM
Ellen Asher, A. J. Austin, Michael F. Flynn, Charles Ryan, Jane Yolen

The issues posed to the panelists beforehand to be thinking about dealt in part with the question of whether the panelists censor themselves. Austin's response was, "Self-censorship? My mom reads my stuff!" Asher said the real problem seemed to be that the trend was to call any form of selection censorship. (Certainly the recent discussion of John Norman on Usenet seems to fall into this category.) The panelists never completely agreed on a definition of "censorship" but seemed to agree that it included physical sanctions of some sort. As long as someone was free to publish his or her own works and sell them, then censorship per se was not being exercised. One can certainly argue this--an entire hour could be spent without ever deciding whether the refusal of two or three major book distributors to carry some work constituted some form of i p s o f a c t o censorship, for example. Yolen said the problem in trying to arrive at such a definition was that some people are defining censorship in terms of commerce and some are defining it in terms of art. (Is the NEA's refusal to fund certain artists censorship?)

Another issue these days is the credentials of the author. This is not merely the question of their technical knowledge of whatever they are writing about, but whether, for example, a biography of Malcolm X is as valid when written by a white author as by a black author. The best-known example of this was T h e E d u c a t i o n o f L i t t l e T r e e, a book about Native Americans widely praised until it was discovered that Forrest Carter, the "Native American" who wrote it, was actually a white racist (some say a former racist). Does a people have the exclusive rights to their story? Yolen said she would not want to see a situation where only Jews could write about Jews, only blacks could write about blacks, and so on, in part because if that is the case, then you can never have a book that includes people from many groups. What people seem to forget, Yolen said, was that writers c r e a t e. That's what writing is about. Writers are s u p p o s e d to be able to write characters other than

themselves. Shakespeare may or may not have been Francis Bacon, but he was not a Jew _ a _ n _ d a Moor _ a _ n _ d a teenage girl _ a _ n _ d a Danish prince _ a _ n _ d an aging king This gets into the whole question of cross-racial casting in films. Could a white man successfully play Martin Luther King? (Yes, Olivier played Othello, but does that apply?) Could Whoopi Goldberg play Juliet?

Ryan pointed out that the artist is supposed to challenge society, and that it is impossible to do so without offending someone. The whole issue of political correctness often seems to center around a distrust of imagination. (In fairness, it seems to me that if "political correctness" is the left-wing of the spectrum, then the right-wing also distrusts imagination and wants to control strictly what children can see and read.) A well-known literary example of challenging society was Henrik Ibsen's _ A _ n _ E _ n _ e _ m _ y _ o _ f _ t _ h _ e _ P _ e _ o _ p _ l _ e, and panelists pointed out that similar problems occur even today when newspapers discover facts about toxic waste that governments want to conceal.

The panelists left themselves and the audience pondering the question of what the difference between self-censorship and moral cowardice was. For example, bookstores that carried Salman Rushdie's _ S _ a _ t _ a _ n _ i _ c _ V _ e _ r _ s _ e _ s were threatened. In some cases, the stores would have the employees decide for themselves whether to carry the book. If a company decides that it is not fair to minimum-wage employees to put them on the front line, is this censorship? Is this moral cowardice? If a school librarian fights to keep a book on the shelf and wins, when the next year's decisions roll around, is she more likely to play it safe and select less controversial books? Is this selection or censorship? Yolen said that the artists should be quicker to praise the clerks and librarians who support them, and much slower to condemn those who have to decide whether to put their jobs and lives on the line for someone else's art.

Biblical Themes in SF and Fantasy

Saturday, 3 PM

Evelyn Leeper (mod), Jeffrey A. Carver, Anne Jordan,

Mark Keller, Josepha Sherman

There was no specified moderator for this panel so I volunteered, on the theory that the moderator gets to ask the

questions rather than having to come up with answers.

I started by saying that I had begun to suspect that there was a growing trend towards Biblical themes in science fiction and

fantasy, having read in short order Norman Spinrad's D_e_u_s_X, Thomas

Monteleone's B_l_o_o_d_o_f_t_h_e_L_a_m_b, Gore Vidal's L_i_v_e

f_r_o_m_G_o_l_g_o_t_h_a, and

Jack Womack's E_l_v_i_s_s_e_y. I thought this might be attributable to

millennialism, but the other panel members seemed to think that this

was just part of an oscillating trend, and noted that the Bible,

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particularly the Old Testament, has always been a major source of

literary as well as spiritual inspiration. The stories of Esther,

David, Moses, and others lend themselves to retelling in various

times and places, including science fictional settings. Mark

Keller, in fact, thinks that all of S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k: T_h_e_N_e_x_t

G_e_n_e_r_a_t_i_o_n

is a retelling of I Kings, with various characters representing

Saul, David, Jonathan, the Assyrians, the Egyptians, and so on.

One person asked if all these characters didn't represent

Jungian archetypes, but the panelists seemed to feel that while they

were archetypal, attaching Jungian significance to them was probably

over-kill. People also discussed deuterocanonical and semi-Biblical

influences (T_h_e_B_o_o_k_o_f_M_o_r_m_o_n for prophetic figures and

especially

in the work of Orson Scott Card, for example). Some thought that

recent discoveries regarding the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Nag Hamadi

Library, and other semi-Biblical and pseudepigraphal works might

lead to more obscure borrowings. Andrew Greeley is known to rely

heavily on Biblical sources, and Harold Bloom's F_l_i_g_h_t_f_r_o_m

L_u_c_i_f_e_r

was also mentioned (though I can't recall the context).

There was some question as to whether one found more Biblical

influences in science fiction or fantasy. At first guess, you might

think fantasy, but it turns out that most fantasy is influenced by

various other mythologies rather than Biblical, and that it may very

well be true that Biblical sources and imagery are used more in

science fiction.

Regarding millennialism, it actually began much earlier than the end of the 20th Century, with William Miller preaching the Second Coming of Christ first in 1843, then March 21, 1844, and finally October 22, 1844. As G_r_o_l_i_e_r's_A_c_a_d_e_m_i_c E_n_c_y_l_o_p_e_d_i_a says, "The failure of these predictions was a serious setback to the movement [founded by Miller], but Miller and some devoted followers continued to preach the imminent return of Christ." The Seventh-Day Adventists grew out of this movement. Just this past year, in fact, another group predicted the end of the world. If it happened, I didn't notice it. (Then again, there was a group that predicted the end of the world around 1918, and when the time passed, they published a book explaining that the world h_a_d ended but no one had noticed.)

Someone noted that science fiction used to be about science, but now was perfectly willing to be about religion instead. Someone else said that the two were not unconnected: predestination is basically the religious version of Newtonian mechanics, free will is more related to Einsteinian theories, the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, and the recent theories of chaos.

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Religious Intolerance in SF and Fandom

Saturday, 4 PM

Elisabeth Carey (mod), Janice Gelb, Alex Jablovkov, Melissa Scott

Carey was worried that this panel would turn into a flame war and so said that the panelists would discuss the topic for a half-hour before taking any questions from the audience. While the discussion may have gotten lively at times, I don't think it was ever near problem proportions.

Jablovkov said that the most obvious intolerance was toward religion in general: when one sees religious characters in science fiction or fantasy, they are either "decadent voluptuaries or

fanatical fundamentalists." Scott added a third category: Zen masters. The latter at least tend to be portrayed in a non-negative light; at worst they seem to be treated as harmless cranks rather than evil forces. Scott said that one reason for this somewhat slanted view is that religious institutions make easy villains. Also, the most obvious religious people are the most annoying, since they are the proselytizers et al. Frequently the author may have his or her own prejudices against certain organizations. One must be careful not to assume this is always the case, however, since characters in a story may have prejudices independent or even contradictory to those of the author. Still, this provides multiple levels for prejudices to appear in a story. Of course, science fiction must also follow through on its premises (Jablokov gave the example of Donald Kingsbury's C_o_u_r_t_s_h_i_p_R_i_t_e). Add to this that writers work with a shared set of assumptions that the readers may not share, and you can see that misunderstandings are almost guaranteed.

Someone (Jablokov, I think) said that all this is what mainstream science fiction fans see, but he noted that there are a large number of science fiction novels published by religious publishers and marketed only in religious bookstores in which religious people are the heroes. One example he gave was a cyberpunk novel in which Southern Baptists are targeted for genocide, but the religious Christian uses his talents to defeat the plot. (Sorry, he didn't give the title or author.)

There is also a tendency to make aliens just like us, only shaped different. Jablokov described this for a story of intelligent dolphins by saying that "dolphin religion is Christianity filtered through several miles of water."

One of the distinctions I asked about was the dividing line between irreverence and intolerance. One response was that to be irreverent one must be a believer, which was not quite what I was asking. Later Gelb said that she drew the line somewhere around the point where people started saying things like, "How can you or any rational person believe such garbage?"

Some people suggested that fandom is an ideology or a religion.

I doubt that most people would agree, but to many fans there is definitely a sense of shared beliefs. Of course, one of these beliefs is that openness is good, so fans say what they think, and this is where the statements such as, "Only an idiot could believe such garbage" come from. Jablokov summed it up by saying that the question is not what is true, but what is polite.

Reading
Saturday, 5 PM
Connie Willis

Willis started by giving the audience the option of hearing part of her novella "Uncharted Territory" (which she was delivering to Bantam), or her novelette "Death on the Nile" from the March issue of A_s_i_m_o_v'_s_S_c_i_e_n_c_e_F_i_c_t_i_o_n. But first she talked about a story that came from her Nebula nomination for "Even the Queen," which appeared in last year's April issue. Apparently people often send out copies of their nominated stories to all SFWA (or is it SFFWA now?) members, with cover letters saying, "In case you missed this, here's a copy in case you might want to consider voting for this for the Nebula award, etc." Usually the copies are extra copies of back issues of the magazines the stories appeared in (though sometimes photocopies were sent if there weren't enough back copies). Anyway, the warehouse in which the back issues of I_s_a_a_c_A_s_i_m_o_v'_s_S_c_i_e_n_c_e_F_i_c_t_i_o_n M_a_g_a_z_i_n_e were stored burned down (making all your back issues more valuable in the process), so Willis was looking forward to sending out letters saying, "In case you missed this, here's a copy in case you might want to consider voting for this for the Nebula award, etc.," and enclosing a tablespoon of ashes. However, the copies of "Even the Queen" were sent out before the fire, so she will have to wait until next year's nominations and see if "Death on the Nile" gets nominated.

Anyway, the audience voted in favor of the first part of the novella, so she read that, first explaining that it arose out of what she called her "D_a_n_c_e_s_w_i_t_h_W_o_l_v_e_s rant," which started before the credits on that film had even finished rolling and ended only when her husband threatened to leave her if she didn't stop. (She says the couple who went to the movies with them will never go with them again.) This rant can also be found in abbreviated form in the L_o_c_u_s interview mentioned earlier (July 1992 issue). She talked about the fact that Sitting Bull became friends with Buffalo Bill Cody shortly after the Battle of Little Big Horn and toured in Buffalo Bill's road show, which Willis finds hard to comprehend. (In an interesting piece of coincidence, Sitting Bull was killed in the Ghost Dance at Wounded Knee in 1890; the Ghost Dance arose from a millennial cult; we had just discussed millennialism an hour earlier. Okay, so it's n_o_t an interesting piece of coincidence.) Willis recommended Evan S. Connell's S_o_n_o_f_t_h_e_M_o_r_n_i_n_g S_t_a_r: C_u_s_t_e_r & L_i_t_t_l_e_B_i_g_H_o_r_n (Harper Collins, 1991, 464pp, \$10.95) as a good

book about that period of history. In addition to objecting to some of the content of D_a_n_c_e_s_w_i_t_h_W_o_l_v_e_s, she also objected to the pedestal that the movie was put on. Western movies were n_o_t all one-sided, she pointed out, and films such as S_h_e_W_o_r_e_a_Y_e_l_l_o_w_R_i_b_b_o_n made the white men as much or more the villains than the Indians. In any case she emphasized that the West was not simple. While there was some mis-information in older images of the West, she continued, "you correct a stereotype with the truth, not with another stereotype." What happened in the settlement of the West she describes as "a tragedy, not a crime."

Another film that she disliked for its distortion of facts to make a "politically correct" statement was F_a_t_M_a_n_a_n_d_L_i_t_t_l_e_B_o_y, which claimed that everyone involved with the atomic bomb knew all about radiation poisoning and other effects of the bomb but used it anyway, rather than the truth, which was that while some people had some idea of the effects, most people thought of it as just a more powerful bomb.

In regard to political correctness, Willis made some additional comments (see also the "History in SF" panel). She said that there are any number of trends and fads in social theory, and that political correctness was one of them. Others she mentioned were the "100th Monkey Theory" and the belief that the American public are sheep. A book she recommended was F_r_e_e_S_p_e_e_c_h_f_o_r_M_e--B_u_t_N_o_t_f_o_r_T_h_e: H_o_w_t_h_e_A_m_e_r_i_c_a_n_L_e_f_t&R_i_g_h_t_C_e_n_s_o_r_E_a_c_h_O_t_h_e_r by Nat Hentoff (Harper Collins, 1992, 384pp, \$25), which discusses the censorship by the Left. In this regard she mentioned the people who want to ban Mark Twain's A_d_v_e_n_t_u_r_e_s_o_f_H_u_c_k_l_e_b_e_r_r_y_F_i_n_n because it uses the word "nigger." In fact, she said, it was removed from the school library of a high school named Mark Twain High School! (She didn't said what town or state.) Willis said that it is important to break the ice around ideas, not enshrine some and ban others.

Willis also talked about writing in general. She said she

could never understand writers who say their characters get away from them and take on a life of their own. "They're my characters, by God! They will do what I tell them to!" She also said that people say that a book should be about the most important day in a person's life, which would seem to imply that most people should write only one book (unless their lives are on a constant up-track).

Complimented on "Even the Queen," Willis hinted it was her response to people who were big on the idea of celebrating womanhood, but hoped it didn't start a genre of "menstruation-punk" even though it could be considered the "bleeding edge" of science fiction. (I have a great idea for the beginnings of an anthology in the "menstruation-punk" genre if anyone is interested.)

The story itself (remember the story?) seems to be of humans arriving on a "primitive" planet and trying to explore it, except

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that the indigenous peoples have somehow discovered political correctness, and use it to stymie even the most trivial efforts.

For example, driving a vehicle gets the explorers fined for "disturbing planetary surface." I will certainly look for it when it comes out (but then I'm an unrepentant Willis groupie); it will be the first of three novellas Willis does for Bantam in their novella series. In addition, she has another novel set in the

D_o_o_m_s_d_a_y_B_o_o_k
universe, tentatively titled T_o_S_a_y_N_o_t_h_i_n_g_o_f_t_h_e
D_o_g, but much

lighter in tone than D_o_o_m_s_d_a_y_B_o_o_k, with no deaths--except maybe a cat that everyone keeps trying to kill.

War of the Worlds
Saturday, 8 PM

This consisted of a fifteen-minute radio interview with H. G. Wells and Orson Welles, followed by the famous broadcast. I had heard the broadcast many times, and was interested in the slide show they put together to go with it, but that turned out to be a bit of a disappointment, since there weren't very many slides (they tended to leave a slide up for two or three minutes), they reused slides (the same farm picture showed up about five times), and the slides weren't always in focus. It was a good idea, though, and

with a bit more effort on the visual side could be quite good. After all, it's basically what Ken Burns did with his "Civil War" series (and all his other documentaries, for that matter).

The Cross-Time Bus: A Comic Play by Joe Mayhew
Saturday, 10 PM

Bruce Coville, Esther Friesner, Joe Haldeman, Chip Hitchcock,
Suford Lewis, Joe Mayhew, Greg Thokar, Mike Zipser

Waiting for this to begin, I found out that somewhere there is a betting pool going on how long my next convention report will be. I just want to mention that for the right price, I can adjust the length to suit. :-)

The play itself was n o t an alternate history (which I had thought it might be), but was just a comic play about someone building a time travel machine (bus, actually), then taking a bunch of Dungeons & Dragons players back to King Arthur's time. Amusing enough, though some of the characters got wearisome after a while. Maybe I was just tired.

At the end they brought out a big birthday cake and everyone sang "Happy Birthday" to Suford Lewis, whose birthday it was. (She had agreed to pinch-hit for Jane Yolen, who was originally supposed to be in the play but was not feeling well.)

After the play, I dropped into the Baltimore in '98 party. As I said before, I was n o t impressed. Time will tell; there are still more than two years before the site selection for 1998.

The Green Room

One of the interesting things about the Green Room is the conversations one overhears. Sunday morning I came in just in time to hear Esther Friesner say, "Do you have any idea how big a walrus's penis is?!" I'm sure she had a good explanation....

She also donated Laura Kinsale's T h e S h a d o w a n d t h e S t a r (from one of the racier lines of romance novels) to the Green Room reading

material supply. Most people stuck to the Sunday _ T_ i_ m_ e_ s instead.

(End of Part 2)