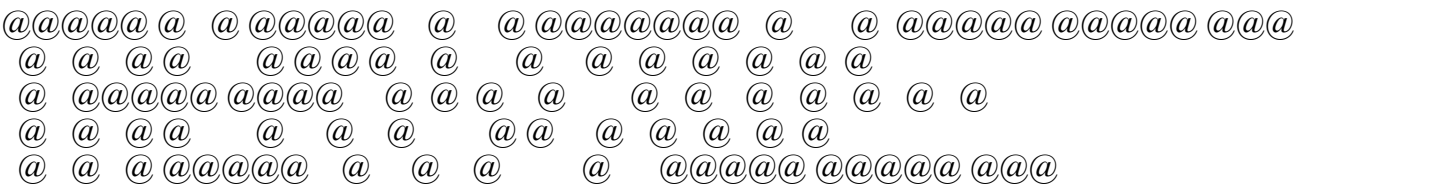

Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
Club Notice - 4/1/94 -- Vol. 12, No. 40

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are in Middletown 1R-400C
Wednesdays at noon.

_D_A_T_E _T_O_P_I_C

04/20 VALIS by Philip K. Dick

Outside events:
The Science Fiction Association of Bergen County meets on the second Saturday of every month in Upper Saddle River; call 201-933-2724 for details. The New Jersey Science Fiction Society meets on the third Saturday of every month in Belleville; call 201-432-5965 for details.

HO Chair: John Jetzt MT 2G-432 908-957-5087 holly!jetzt
LZ Chair: Rob Mitchell HO 1C-523 908-834-1267 holly!jrrt
MT Chair: Mark Leeper MT 3D-441 908-957-5619 mtgzfs3!leeper
HO Librarian: Nick Sauer HO 4F-427 908-949-7076 homxc!11366ns
LZ Librarian: Lance Larsen HO 2C-318 908-949-4156 quartet!lfl
MT Librarian: Mark Leeper MT 3D-441 908-957-5619 mtgzfs3!leeper
Factotum: Evelyn Leeper MT 1F-329 908-957-2070 mtgpfs1!ecl

1. What with one thing and another it has been a while since we had a film festival. It probably is time to reschedule. It has been a long hard winter so it probably would be a good idea to have some light-hearted comedies. We recently were treated to the film _G_r_e_e_d_y, a reputedly not-very-funny comedy about human greed. Human greed is a fairly serious subject, of course. Second only to sex, greed brings out the unvarnished animal in us. That probably is what makes greed a funny subject for film. It stands to reason there should be some good comedies on the subject. I can think of three good comedies on this thorny subject. We don't have _T_h_e _F_o_r_t_u_n_e _C_o_o_k_i_e but we do have the other two. On Thursday, April 7, at 7PM we will be showing:

Crime, Greed, and Chaos
RUTHLESS PEOPLE (1986) dir. by Abrahams, Zucker, Abrahams
WRONG BOX (1966) dir. by Bryan Forbes

In _R_u_t_h_l_e_s_s _P_e_o_p_l_e Danny DeVito has very deep feelings about his wife of fifteen years (played by Bette Midler). One of the things he feels deeply is that he doesn't want her alive to make it sixteen. He is ready and willing to kill her when his plans go wrong--sort of. She is kidnapped by two desperate people who will kill her if DeVito doesn't come up with $500,000. But can they be enticed to carry out their threat? I won't describe the chaos that occurs, but _R_u_t_h_l_e_s_s _P_e_o_p_l_e is a sort of a _B_l_o_o_d _S_i_m_p_l_e with jokes. Lots of them. And little surprises. This film is directed by the same team that directed _A_i_r_p_l_a_n_e! And back then it was the full team--nowadays they are working separately. _R_u_t_h_l_e_s_s _P_e_o_p_l_e is a laugh-out-loud comedy. Feisty little DeVito carries the film with a good-natured malevolence that is a positive joy to watch. Bette Midler's anything-but-helpless kidnap victim will give nightmares to any potential kidnapper in the country. Judge Reinholt and Helen Slater are a little too pat as the kidnappers, but the script even gives them a few good scenes.

_T_h_e _W_r_o_n_g _B_o_x starts with about ten minutes of solid laughs, then calms down to just a very funny film. The film is about a tontine amongst gentlemen. Whoever lives the longest wins the lottery and he or his heirs will be fabulously wealthy. There are two cousins, played by John Mills and Ralph Richardson, who are the last survivors. Things start happening when Richardson's two evil sons (played by Peter Cook and Dudley Moore) decide to secure the prize with--gasp!--foul play. This is a terrific screwball comedy based on a novel by Robert Louis Stevenson and set in Victorian London. The film stars Michael Caine as John Mills's not-to-bright son and also has a delightful small role for Peter Sellers. But the most hilarious character is Peacock. I won't even describe Peacock. This film is not an easy one to find and it is very, very funny.

==========

2. THE PAPER (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

> Capsule review: Ron Howard's look at the turbulent life on a struggling middle-brow newspaper makes some pointed observations about the newspaper business but spoils it all trying to tie too many loose ends in too silly a final act. Rating: low +1 (-4 to +4)

Ron Howard's newest film about working-class heroes is a look at what goes on in and out of an incredibly chaotic newsroom. Just as he previously did with firefighters in _B_a_c_k_d_r_a_f_t, he is now showing how a good newspaper staff, even on a sleezy-looking tabloid, can make all the difference for a city like New York. It is a story that has been done several times, though usually based on the play "The Front Page" by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur. _T_h_e _P_a_p_e_r is

not obviously based on that play, but the fast-paced style, newsroom pandemonium, comic touches, reporter looking to get out of the job, and even the basic plot of the news scoop that could prevent an injustice leave little doubt where David and Stephan Koepp probably got much of their inspiration.

The film covers 24 hours and 10 seconds in the life of wise-cracking tabloid editor/reporter Henry Hackett (played by Michael Keaton). Even in Hackett's hectic life, this is a particularly frenetic day. His very pregnant wife (played by Marisa Tomei) is an ex-reporter with numerous nightmares of impending empty and prosaic future. Martha Hackett is pushing her husband to take a better-paying and more dependable job. Henry has been offered the job at the New York Times (pronounced "Sentinel") where he will be a soulless, neat professional instead of the wild seat-of-the-pants reporter he is used to being. The Sentinel is the kind of paper where you worry less about scoops and more about being "comprehensive." Complicating matters is a local government functionary has a vendetta against McDougal, a brilliant and grungy co-reporter played by Randy Quaid. Throw into the mix Bernie White (Robert Duvall) a slightly obnoxious chief editor with family problems, prostate cancer, and apparently smoking-related

illnesses. All the subplots tie themselves up in ways ranging from unsurprising to highly predictable, even if along the way they take detours through total absurdity.

The pacing of the story is frenetic though at the same time often informative, if somewhat cynical. The meetings to decide how much to emphasize the various breaking stories are absolute gems. One irritation I had watching the film was I kept getting carbonation bubbles up my nose. Ron Howard kept rubbing it in Coca-Cola and its subsidiary products. Calling these product "placements" seems too gentle. This was a product barrage. Howard may have been making up for product placement opportunities missed when he made _F_a_r _a_n_d _A_w_a_y.

It would be nice to say that Keaton brought some sort of deep resonance to his role. One sort of expects that, but the character of Hackett really does not need or give opportunity for good acting. Hackett is an inconsiderate wiseguy who loves only his job and his wife, in pretty much that order. That doesn't give Keaton much latitude to act. Marginally more room is given to Duvall as Bernie White. Duvall gives him a few rough Jewish characteristics, but this will not be a well-remembered role for him. Glenn Close is bullish and officious. Hers is certainly one of the more interesting characters but her role in a disastrously miscalculated scene toward the end. Marisa Tomei has more drama than she has had in previous roles but doers not carry it well.

_T_h_e _P_a_p_e_r has many good moments but overall could have been a much better movie. I give it a low +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

[Note: the play "The Front Page" referred to above has been filmed four times: _T_h_e _F_r_o_n_t _P_a_g_e (1931), _H_i_s _G_i_r_l _F_r_i_d_a_y (1940), _T_h_e _F_r_o_n_t _P_a_g_e (1974), and _S_w_i_t_c_h_i_n_g _C_h_a_n_n_e_l_s (1988).]

==========

3. Boskone 31 (con report by Evelyn C. Leeper) (part 3 of 3):

Creating an Internally Consistent Religion

Saturday, 3 PM
David A. Smith (mod), James Patrick Kelly, Rosemary Kirstein

In the usual introductions, Kelly said that he had written _P_l_a_n_e_t _o_f _W_h_i_s_p_e_r_s and _L_o_o_k _i_n_t_o _t_h_e _S_u_n (based on Julian Jaynes's _O_r_i_g_i_n _o_f _C_o_n_s_c_i_o_u_s_n_e_s_s _i_n _t_h_e _B_r_e_a_k_d_o_w_n _o_f _t_h_e _B_i_c_a_m_e_r_a_l _M_i_n_d).

The panelists started out by saying they were not going to define religion. (Darn!) So they began by asking what it means for a religion to be inconsistent. Well, one answer would be that it says one thing and does another, though no examples were given. Also, they said, reality can make a religion inconsistent. I do not know if by this they were referring to the sort of problem that strict Biblical fundamentalists have with a heliocentric solar system, or what. (Later, the example was given of the Boxer Rebellion, in which warriors were told that they were invincible. The problem, as someone expressed it, was that the bullets did not believe this.) Another idea of an inconsistent religion might be one in which on the one hand there is a command to be fruitful and multiply, while on the other hand, sex is taught as something to be avoided.

Someone listed the five branches of philosophy at this point:

- logic--provides the rational basis for philosophical discussion
- epistemology--theory of knowledge
- metaphysics or ontology--study of nature of reality
- ethics--study of what is good
- aesthetics--study of what is beautiful

It was not clear what this had to do with the question at hand, but it was educational enough that I decided to include it.

The discussion moved to examining the nature of consciousness. Someone felt that consciousness was connected to the idea of a personal god that speaks to one.

As to why to create a religion at all, the panelists said that it was one way to motivate a character. But they warned about getting too specific too quickly, which may be why most fictional religions

are not inconsistent--there is not enough there to make them inconsistent.

As an example of a fairly completely fleshed-out religion (as fictional ones go), someone gave the example of the religion in Frank Herbert's _D_u_n_e. Harry Turtledove has the premise that all religions are true in his "Visdessos" series, and also in _T_h_e _C_a_s_e _o_f _t_h_e _T_o_x_i_c _S_p_e_l_l _D_u_m_p, which I would think would lead to inconsistencies if two different religions claim that they are each the only way to salvation.

Someone asked if humans need religion (here defined as a belief in something beyond oneself). Many people seemed to agree that there could be an ethical content without spiritual motivation (though the Boy Scouts of America seem to disagree). And there is also a distinction between "hard" religion and "soft" religion.

Books mentioned that used religion as a major focus included Walter M. Miller's _C_a_n_t_i_c_l_e _f_o_r _L_e_i_b_o_w_i_t_z (a pre-Vatican-II, post-nuclear Catholicism); Robert A. Heinlein's _U_n_i_v_e_r_s_e; Fritz Leiber's _G_a_t_h_e_r, _D_a_r_k_n_e_s_s; James Blish's _C_a_s_e _o_f _C_o_n_s_c_i_e_n_c_e and _B_l_a_c_k _E_a_s_t_e_r; Kurt Vonnegut's _C_a_t'_s _C_r_a_d_l_e; and the work of L. Ron Hubbard. The latter was in response to someone who said that in novels, you know the made-up religion is false so you do not believe it. This gave rise to the question of whether an author could create a religion that people will believe in (or at least want to). And what people want to believe in can vary widely--someone claimed that the Inuit often find descriptions of Hell inviting! Heinlein's _S_t_r_a_n_g_e_r _i_n _a _S_t_r_a_n_g_e _L_a_n_d was given as an example of a religion that people did want to believe in, though whether it actually "worked" was unclear. And Heinlein of course reminds us that authors may also create religions to "prove" their ideas. Early Roger Zelazny, according to some, did this as well.

A religion must also be economically viable as well as internally consistent. For example, if a religion demands a virgin sacrifice every day, there better be a _l_a_r_g_e supply of virgins handy. (One of the reasons the Spanish were able to conquer the Aztecs was that all the neighboring tribes helped fight the Aztecs, who had been raiding them to get enough victims for their sacrifices.)

Autographing
Saturday, 4:30 PM
Emma Bull

Luck of Leeper states that if I bring books by two authors to be autographed, at least one will not be at the convention. So I got my _W_a_r _f_o_r _t_h_e _O_a_k_s autographed by Emma Bull, but Kara Dalkey was not there to autograph _ T_ h_ e _ N_ i_ g_ h_ t_ i_ n_ g_ a_ l_ e.

Parties

I dropped by the Readercon party to buy my supporting membership and the "Boston in 2001" party to find out what was going on. Not much was happening either place, or at most of the other parties (maybe I was just early), so I went back to the room and crashed. Last year I had attended the "Boston in 1998" party and my feeling had been that there was no really good choice for 1998, because Niagara Falls and Boston probably did not have the facilities/hotels needed, and the Baltimore people were concentrating too much on offering rum drinks and not enough on content or planning. The latter seems to have improved (I think someone told them they had to _ s_ h_ o_ w that their act was together, not just have it secretly together), and they seem to be the front-runner. (I'm saving my Boston vote for 2001, since if it's in Boston in 1998, it cannot be in Boston in 2001.)

Origami
Sunday, 10 AM
Mark R. Leeper (mod)

I did not attend this, but saw it while I was cruising the art show. It seemed well-attended, though Mark mentioned that he was not happy about having the workshop shut down after only one hour. Since teaching origami takes a while, it would have been better to have it somewhere where they could have gone two hours.

The Forgotten Fantasists: Swann, Warner, and others
Sunday, 11 AM
Greer Gilman, Nancy C. Hanger, Don Keller

This was described as an "advocacy" panel. Much of it consisted of the panelists either listing authors they recommended, or actually reading excerpts from these authors' works. But other interesting tidbits were revealed. For example, Keller mentioned that William Morris invented the fantasy novel writing pastiches of medieval romances.

Gilman started by reading from Sylvia Townsend Warner's _ L_ o_ l_ l_ y

_ W_ i_ l_ l_ o_ w_ e_ s (which she mentioned had been the very first Book-of-the-Month Club selection). She also recommended Warner's _ K_ i_ n_ g_ d_ o_ m_ s _ o_ f _ E_ l_ f_ i_ n and _ C_ a_ t'_ s _ C_ r_ a_ d_ l_ e, and Rachel Ferguson's _ T_ h_ e _ B_ r_ o_ n_ t_ e_ s _ W_ e_ n_ t _ t_ o _ W_ o_ o_ l_ w_ o_ r_ t_ h'_ s (recently reprinted by Virago Press), which she described as "the urban fantasy of its time." (The Library of Congress, by the way, does not list the title _ C_ a_ t'_ s _ C_ r_ a_ d_ l_ e for Warner. However, it also does not list Hope Mirrlees's _ L_ U_ D-_ i_ n-_ t_ h_ e-_ M_ i_ s_ t, which I _ k_ n_ o_ w exists, so do not take this as gospel.)

George MacDonald was also recommended. His works are hard to find, but the panelists recommended you try Christian publishers. The edition of his works someone had was from the Ballantine "Adult

Fantasy" series, which led people to list all the other authors published in that series as well. (There were about sixty books in the series; no, I cannot list them all!) MacDonald's were "dream country" rather than "somewhere else," a distinction that turns out to be of some interest in analyzing fantasy. MacDonald was described as a Christian theologian rather than as a Christian apologist (a term usually applied to C. S. Lewis).

A lot was said about Charles Williams, including that he could also be considered a writer of urban fantasy. Someone said they fell in love with his work when they read the first sentence of _ W_ a_ r _ i_ n _ H_ e_ a_ v_ e_ n: "The telephone was ringing wildly but there was no one to answer it except the corpse lying under the desk."

Hope Mirrlees was called a "minor Bloomsburyite."

Karen Michalson's study _ V_ i_ c_ t_ o_ r_ i_ a_ n _ F_ a_ n_ t_ a_ s_ y _ L_ i_ t_ e_ r_ a_ t_ u_ r_ e was recommended. It explains, among other things, why fantasists were forgotten. (It has to do with political heterodoxy, and also with the fact that they wrote with no marketing constraints.) A lot of literary terms and references were thrown around, which I did not note down.

Other recommendations included _ E_ a_ r_ t_ h_ f_ a_ s_ t_ s and _ T_ h_ e _ G_ r_ a_ s_ s _ R_ o_ p_ e by

William Mayne (I could not find a listing for the latter in the Library of Congress); _ T_ r_ a_ v_ e_ l_ l_ e_ r _ i_ n _ T_ i_ m_ e by Alison Utley; someone's _ R_ a_ c_ h_ e_ l _ a_ n_ d _ t_ h_ e _ S_ e_ v_ e_ n _ W_ o_ n_ d_ e_ r_ s (again, I could not find a listing); _ T_ h_ e _ A_ b_ a_ n_ d_ o_ n_ e_ d, _ T_ h_ e _ M_ a_ n _ W_ h_ o _ W_ a_ s _ M_ a_ g_ i_ c, and _ M_ a_ n_ x_ m_ o_ u_ s_ e by Paul Gallico; _ L_ a_ d_ y _ F_ e_ r_ r_ y by Sarah Orne Jewett (I found lots of listings for her, but no book of this title); and _ T_ h_ e _ S_ h_ e_ r_ w_ o_ o_ d _ R_ i_ n_ g and _ T_ h_ e _ P_ e_ r_ i_ l_ o_ u_ s _ G_ a_ r_ d by Elizabeth Marie Pope.

The City and The Story
Sunday, 12 noon
Moshe Feder (mod), Emma Bull, Greer Gilman, Steve Popkes, Madeleine Robins

Most of the panelists (at least the authors) had written urban fantasies, but Gilman described herself as the "token pastoralist" on the panel, since none of her work is set in cities. (Apparently the idea of "the City and the _ S_ c_ i_ e_ n_ c_ e _ F_ i_ c_ t_ i_ o_ n Story" was not going to be discussed.)

The obvious first question (which was also the actual first question) is, "Are cities good places for fantasy?" The panelists felt that they were, because the density of people in cities provides a lot of opportunity. They also note that Teresa Nielsen Hayden claimed there were two different scenarios for cities in fantasy (or science fiction): the City of Tomorrow, and the City of Dreadful Night. According to someone on the panel, Nielsen Hayden made the distinction by saying, "The City of Tomorrow is full of hope but has no sex and no one takes out the garbage," while the

City of Dreadful Night may be more depressing but is also more realistic.

The wide opportunity for characters is enhanced by the fact that "being born in New York City doesn't make you a New Yorker" (as one panelists noted). "Some people are born to live in Cleveland." Other panelists compared this lack of identification with the city of one's birth to some people's lack of identification with the

gender of their birth.

The whole question of the "city and the story" made the panelists ask if there were stories in which the setting was paramount, or at least more important than the characters. Bull said that people respond to their environment, but that the people (characters) are paramount. Gilman disagreed, at least mildly, by citing Joseph Conrad as an author whose settings are very important, perhaps more important than his characters. Someone responded that Conrad's settings _ a_ r_ e his characters. Bull agreed that settings could replace some characters; she said that Lankhmar would need at least eighteen characters to replace it as a setting.

People agreed that science fiction uses settings more than mainstream fiction does. Some examples of setting-based mainstream fiction given were John Dos Passos's _ U_ S_ A, Toni Morrison's _ B_ e_ l_ o_ v_ e_ d, Peter Matthiessen's _ F_ a_ r _ T_ o_ r_ t_ u_ g_ a, Thornton Wilder's _ B_ r_ i_ d_ g_ e_ s _ o_ f _ S_ a_ n _ L_ u_ i_ s _ R_ e_ y, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's _ O_ n_ e _ H_ u_ n_ d_ r_ e_ d _ Y_ e_ a_ r_ s _ o_ f _ S_ o_ l_ i_ t_ u_ d_ e, and most of Charles Dickens's works. Science fiction works that are setting-based include John Stith's _ M_ a_ n_ h_ a_ t_ t_ a_ n _ T_ r_ a_ n_ s_ f_ e_ r, Samuel Delany's _ D_ h_ a_ l_ g_ r_ e_ n, Ursula K. LeGuin's _ L_ e_ f_ t _ H_ a_ n_ d _ o_ f _ D_ a_ r_ k_ n_ e_ s_ s, Brian Aldiss's _ M_ a_ l_ a_ c_ i_ a _ T_ a_ p_ e_ s_ t_ r_ y, Robert Sheckley's "Street of Dreams, Feet of Clay," A. J. Deutsch's "Subway Named Moebius," and Thea von Harbou's _ M_ e_ t_ r_ o_ p_ o_ l_ i_ s. One book mentioned as being an interesting urban fantasy was Rachel Pollack's _ U_ n_ q_ u_ e_ n_ c_ h_ a_ b_ l_ e _ F_ i_ r_ e, in which magic devices are bought at the local K-Mart.

Has the city, then, replaced the island in literature as a microcosm? It has its own self-imposed isolation. (The film _ P_ r_ o_ s_ p_ e_ r_ o'_ s _ B_ o_ o_ k_ s is an urban landscape, even though everything takes place indoors.) Neighborhoods in the city can recreate the village, and parts outside the neighborhood can appear to be the dark wood (which panelists had agreed _ h_ a_ d been replaced by the city). And since people in cities ignore a lot of things, fantasy can occur unnoticed. Some people on the panel claimed this image of city people ignoring their surroundings was not a true image of city people, but the fate Kitty Genovese reminds us that it is at least partly true.

I asked if authors write about cities they have not visited as well as cities they are familiar with. Then I rephrased it as, well, yes, of course they do sometimes, but what are the differences? Robins said that she used the money from her first book set in

London to make her first visit to London, but the question got dropped fairly fast. Bull did say that the Plaza of the Three Cultures in Mexico City was her most science-fictional experience. There a statue there which is remaining at the same level while the plaza (and the city) around it are sinking, so gradually more and more steps are added up to the statue. Robins said her most science-fictional experience was going to the World's Fair in New York after it was closed and seeing what looked like a post-holocaust world around her. (Someone asked her which World's Fair, to which Bull responded that Robins "has this oil painting in her attic....")

As far as writing stories in different cities, Bull said that she would like to spread out, and perhaps set her next story in St. Paul (especially after how she treated it in _ W_ a_ r _ f_ o_ r _ t_ h_ e _ O_ a_ k_ s). She also wanted to set a story in Taxco, Mexico. Popkes wanted to set a story in Berlin, Gilman in Whitby (used in Bram Stoker's _ D_ r_ a_ c_ u_ l_ a), and Robins in Florence, Italy; or Los Angeles.

Gilman pointed out that even her pastoral settings are not natural. Moors are made by burning forests and will return to forest unless they are maintained. So even landscapes are not untouched by humans and civilization. Popkes saw this, and cities, as a metaphor of humans changing the earth. He also said that cities have one of everything, and described walking down Park Avenue last December and passing a man carrying a handful of whips and calling out, "Whips for sale! Whips for sale! Great stocking-stuffers!" (I figure he was probably doing a brisk business with tourists who then took them home and said, "Hey, Marge, look what they're selling on the streets of New York!" Like Broadway shows, it's probably only the tourist trade that keeps him going.)

What's BIG in the Small Press
Sunday, 1 PM
Mark Olson (mod), Ken Gale, Carl Lundgren, Charles Ryan, Lawrence Schimel

First the panelists listed their small press "credentials." Olson works with NESFA Press, which started out doing books to honor the Guests of Honor at Boskones, but has branched out into doing other works, its latest being _ T_ h_ e _ R_ e_ d_ i_ s_ c_ o_ v_ e_ r_ y _ o_ f _ M_ a_ n, the collected short stories of Cordwainer Smith. Gale does Evolution Comics, Lundgren does his own art books, and Schimel does poetry through Midsummer Night's Press, a letter press. Ryan does "First Books," which he said was an example of how small presses take the risk when large

companies will not. Olson agreed with that, saying that when NESFA Press had gone back to Smith's estate to try to purchase the rights for _ N_ o_ r_ s_ t_ r_ i_ l_ i_ a, they were told that these right were more valuable and would cost most than NESFA had offered to pay. NESFA pointed out that they were more valuable precisely because NESFA had published the collection and generated new interest, but also said that if the estate could sell the rights to a major publisher for

the higher price, that was fine with them: NESFA's goal is to get the works they like back in print.

Among the problems faced by small press publishers seems to be the necessity to pay "placement fees" to get distributors to carry them. (So far as I could tell, these were more like bribes than legitimate fees.) Ryan said that the inability to pay these fees was one reason why _ A_ b_ o_ r_ i_ g_ i_ n_ a_ l had problems getting into the market. Also, bookstores want a lot of extra copies. For example, Waldenbooks wants no more than 50% sell-through, meaning that if the publisher sends them 1000 copies, at least 500 will not be sold and will be destroyed. So it the publisher is working on a small margin, meeting these requirements is impossible.

NESFA also has problems because of the marketing. Dealers get a 40% discount, so the list price for the book must actually reflect a profit at their wholesale rate, e.g., if the book costs $12 to produce, then it must be priced at a minimum of $20 just to break even. And bigger distributors want bigger discounts (50%-55%), so if you plan on using those, the list price goes even higher (in the previous example, it would have to be $25). Of course, this means when you buy direct from NESFA (at a convention, for example), they get a lot more of the profit.

Good reviews help a little--NESFA estimates that they add about 6% to the retail sales of the book. (_ T_ h_ e _ R_ e_ d_ i_ s_ c_ o_ v_ e_ r_ y _ o_ f _ M_ a_ n was reviewed favorably in _ P_ u_ b_ l_ i_ s_ h_ e_ r_ s _ W_ e_ e_ k_ l_ y, for example.) Harlan Ellison's rantings about the same book at ConFrancisco, colorful as they were, seem to have added only about thirty more retail sales than NESFA was expecting there.

There was some discussion of hardback versus paperback books and their marketing. Someone gave the example that Tor does a hundred hardback books a year and a thousand paperbacks, yet makes more on their hardbacks. This undoubtedly has to do with the returns system--unsold hardbacks are returned to Tor for resale, while unsold paperbacks are stripped and destroyed. Also, some magazines and newspapers will not review paperbacks, which means less exposure.

Authors and artists who are currently being published almost entirely by small presses include Carol Emshwiller, David Bunch, and R. A. Lafferty. Someone mentioned Edward R. Tufte's _ V_ i_ s_ u_ a_ l _ D_ i_ s_ p_ l_ a_ y _ o_ f _ Q_ u_ a_ n_ t_ i_ t_ a_ t_ i_ v_ e _ R_ e_ s_ e_ a_ r_ c_ h from Graphics Press, and Tom Clancy got his start having _ T_ h_ e _ H_ u_ n_ t _ f_ o_ r _ R_ e_ d _ O_ c_ t_ o_ b_ e_ r published by the Naval Institute Press.

Small presses used to do more with "collector's limited editions" (or maybe one should say that there used to be more small presses who specialized in them), but the market crashed a few years ago. Some, like Mark Zeising and Donald Grant, are still around, but

others, such as Pulphouse and Phantasia, are gone.

The Transcendent Man--A Theme in SF and Fantasy
Sunday, 2 PM
Evelyn C. Leeper (mod), Jeffrey A. Carver, Geary Gravel, Nancy C. Hanger, James D. MacDonald

(Thanks to Mark Leeper for taking copious notes at this panel.)

There were the usual introductions. Carver writes about transcendence in books such as _ N_ e_ p_ t_ u_ n_ e _ C_ r_ o_ s_ s_ i_ n_ g. Gravel said something about "transcending the limits on animation," whatever that meant. Hanger said she was in editorial production and a priest (she did not say of what church). MacDonald said his books could be found under Doyle (Debra Doyle, his co-author).

We all agreed we were talking about the transcendent person rather than just the transcendent man. Of course, that still left us with the question of what exactly was meant by transcendence. My reading beforehand led me to believe that this meant the transformation of the physical into the spiritual, and while there were some stories that used this as a theme, there were not many. However, by extending the definition of transcendence to include any transformation of humans into something substantively greater (or at least different), we could find far more to talk about, and indeed that is the definition we used.

At the beginning some examples were given, just so the audience could get a handle on what we meant. Carver mentioned Greg Bear's _ B_ l_ o_ o_ d _ M_ u_ s_ i_ c as an example of a physical transformation. (A spiritual transformation, on the other hand, might involve no physical transformation.) Gravel said that things that affect one person affect all of humanity and gave Alfred Bester's _ D_ e_ m_ o_ l_ i_ s_ h_ e_ d _ M_ a_ n and _ S_ t_ a_ r_ s _ M_ y _ D_ e_ s_ t_ i_ n_ a_ t_ i_ o_ n as examples. When someone is transformed, they ask, "What do I do now?" and the answer seems to be, "Go cosmic. Push the race someplace new." Carver felt that at its core science fiction was about the transformation of man, and that in a real sense what people were saying was true, but not in a science fiction sense. Someone noted that science fiction novels deal with how we get from here to there, while in fantasy the transcendence is often assumed and is the basis of the story.

Hanger saw transcendence as "man plus" building a "newer, better man," but always making sure that the result still had a soul. MacDonald asked if there was any way to prove that transcendence had happened, and if we were not really talking about a type of elitism. Carver responded that we were not--that we were not talking about some people being above others, but about everyone changing into something different. He gave the example of Vernor Vinge's _ F_ i_ r_ e _ U_ p_ o_ n _ t_ h_ e _ D_ e_ e_ p and its part of the galaxy known as the Transcend. I suggested that this idea was very similar to Poul

Anderson's _ B_ r_ a_ i_ n _ W_ a_ v_ e, in which the Earth passes out of a cloud that has slowed down our mental functions, and as a result we become much smarter. Hanger said that she would not call that

transcendence, but did not know what she would call it.

Carver said that there have been examples of transcendence in science fiction, and cited Arthur C. Clarke's _Childhood's End_. Hanger added Spider and Jeanne Robinson's _Stardance_. I said that a lot of Olaf Stapledon dealt with transcendence, often physical (as in _Last and First Men_), but often spiritual. Indeed, many of his beings are not physical entities in the usual sense in the first place.

Gravel said that transcendence was a very attractive idea--the science fiction fan wants something that will transform us. I said this made it sound as though transcendence came from an outside influence or force rather than from within. Gravel said that in fiction, of course, this outside force was the author, and added, "I like the author as God." He again gave as a good example of transcendence in science fiction _The Starsmy Destination_, in which the result of the transcendence is that "man will spill out into the stars."

As an example of non-human transcendence, I talked about Arthur C. Clarke's "Dial 'F' for Frankenstein," in which the telephone switching system gets enough computers added to it that the complexity reaches a certain level and it becomes sentient. MacDonald said that might be connected to the fact that lawyers communicate over the telephone; I asked him if he also wrote for the _Weekly World News_. (By the way, did you know that according to the _Weekly World News_, during the recent Los Angeles earthquake the freeways cracked open and demons from Hell came through the cracks?)

Even what is often called the first science fiction novel, Mary Shelley's _Frankenstein_, deals with a form of transcendence. And the early science fiction film _Metropolis_ does as well, giving the theme a long history in that medium too. Carver said that in these and other works, the old issue of transcendence centers around who we are and why we are here, and that when hard science fiction examines these questions, you have the point where hard science fiction merges with fantasy and religion.

Hanger asked if someone can be transcendent without God's interference; can an author write a novel convincingly in which this happens? This, of course, is one of the underlying themes of _Frankenstein_. Gravel pointed out that since MacDonald had asked earlier if there was any way to prove that transcendence had happened, and said that he thought that the only way you could be sure was if God appeared and validated it. Audience members said that all of this got into the difference between the Western and

Eastern ideas of godhead. The Western idea says that God is external to us; the Eastern idea is that God is internal (is within each of us). Therefore, if we transcend, then the seed of transcendence was in us all along, so it is not really transcending. Carver said that there are novels that assume no outside influence (i.e., God), and gave _ B_ l_ o_ o_ d _ M_ u_ s_ i_ c as one example.

MacDonald said that the problem was that often the transcendence or transformation can be interpreted as just in other people's perceptions. If we say it is the perception of others, then we cannot say it has happened at all, and if it's from inside, then we cannot tell whether it has "really" happened either, even if (as Hanger suggested) we assume a limit and say that anything beyond it is transcendence.

Of course, in many stories human beings reject transcendence, and Gravel pointed out that a lot of science fiction says that the best thing you can be is human. _ C_ o_ c_ o_ o_ n _ 2, for example, is about why the human beings who have been given eternal youth (certainly a form of transcendence) are not happy with it. Someone in the audience pointed out that frequently after transcending, going back means dying or getting killed. Hanger noted that coming back for the wrong reasons is not acceptable either (and cited "The Little Mermaid"). This reinforced Carver's question as to why anyone would _ w_ a_ n_ t to come back from transcendence (other than to move the plot along). Then too, in some stories people do not give up transcendence, but rather refuse it in the first place: some of the characters in _ B_ r_ a_ i_ n _ W_ a_ v_ e and also in Robert Charles Wilson's _ H_ a_ r_ v_ e_ s_ t.

I said that a lot of mythologies have the story of the god who becomes human, although of course the question is whether he really _ b_ e_ c_ o_ m_ e_ s human or just seems human. If he knows that he cannot die (permanently), then he isn't fully human. Someone in the audience said that Roger Zelazny's _ L_ o_ r_ d _ o_ f _ L_ i_ g_ h_ t and _ I_ s_ l_ e _ o_ f _ t_ h_ e _ D_ e_ a_ d are stories about transcendence, in which characters take on the godhead but are still human, and that _ I_ s_ l_ e _ o_ f _ t_ h_ e _ D_ e_ a_ d actually "plays both sides of the fence." (I have not read it, at least not recently, so I couldn't say.)

Gravel said that _ L_ o_ r_ d _ o_ f _ L_ i_ g_ h_ t was definitely about transcendence,

but that even as gods people were human. Similarly, in the film _ F_ o_ r_ b_ i_ d_ d_ e_ n _ P_ l_ a_ n_ e_ t it was the human (or rather, non-transcendent) nature of the Krell (and of Moebius) which remained in force that made the transcendence such a danger. Gravel said that the latter is showing there are thing you cannot do (shades of "there are some things Man was not meant to know/tamper with"). In H. G. Wells's "Man Who Could Work Miracles" the main character is given great powers, and then must be bailed out by the angels at the end. Hanger responded that this belief in human limitation was a function of two thousand years of Catholicism shaping our views.

Mark Leeper added that the Kabalah required that you have the right motives for using it. And of course they must be genuine right motives--you cannot will yourself to want something for the right reasons.

Someone in the audience asked how an author could depict super-intelligent creatures. Carver said that one way was from the "other's" (i.e., that being's) point of view. I noted that Daniel Keyes tried to do this in _ F_ l_ o_ w_ e_ r_ s _ f_ o_ r _ A_ l_ g_ e_ r_ n_ o_ n, which of course is another transformation story, but that of an individual rather than of humanity as a whole.

MacDonald asked if Superman was transcending in his phone booth. Carver responded that Superman was always Superman; he was merely changing his persona. On the other hand, I pointed out, a werewolf is genuinely undergoing a transformation. Someone in the audience added that Captain Marvel was another example of a genuine transformation, and MacDonald asked, "What about Batman?" I said that no, he didn't get any new powers when he put on the costume. On the other hand, is the growing up of a child into an adult transcendence?

Gravel concluded by saying, "Science fiction readers are transcendence people. Most of us look at the film _ T_ h_ e _ M_ a_ n _ W_ h_ o _ C_ o_ u_ l_ d _ W_ o_ r_ k _ M_ i_ r_ a_ c_ l_ e_ s and say, 'I'd know what to do.'" At the very end of the panel, Carver said that without the theme of transcendence we would not have science fiction today, to which I

immediately responded, "How can you say that at the end when there's no time to discuss it?!" So we have a lead-in for a panel next year if anyone's interested.

Does It Have to Be a SpaceMAN?: Gender and Characterization
Sunday, 3 PM
Hal Clement, Peter Johnson, Evelyn C. Leeper

After the previous panel we went down to the Green Room so that Mark could get reimbursed for the origami paper he had bought. The phone rang, and someone called me to it. Who could be calling me in the Green Room? It was Laurie Mann, who said she was at the panel on gender and characterization and none of the scheduled women panelists had shown up. Since having a panel on gender that had only men on it was a little peculiar, she asked if I could fill in. So it was not really me that the call was for, but any woman who happened to be there.

At any rate, I agreed to do the best I could, given that I had no preparation and the panel apparently had no moderator. (By sitting down between the other two panelists when I arrived, I managed to inherit that task.) But I can't say that much of substance was discussed or concluded. After all the panelists agreed that, no, it doesn't have to be a space_ m_ a_ n, what else was left? Clement said

that he usually avoided the issue entirely by using aliens instead of human beings, because the science and world-building was the part he liked, not the characterization. I said that it was more important to have realistic characters than some artificial mix, and that while Heinlein's women are often used as examples of strong women characters in science fiction, they are really fairly badly drawn--but then, so are Heinlein's men. The discussion filled the hour, but I can recall nothing else to include here. (I realize now how much I have come to depend on Mark's notes for panels I'm on!)

Deconstructing Tokyo: Godzilla as Metaphor, etc.
Sunday, 4 PM
Jim Mann (mod), Bob Eggleton

(Having stayed for the 3 PM panel, we figured we might as well stay for this one as well. After all, the drive home was not going to include a blizzard this year.)

There's not too much to say about this panel. There were only four or five attendees (all of whom got official Boskone "Godzilla Fan" ribbons). The panelists felt that because of the way Godzilla films are perceived in the United States, people do not notice some of their positive points. For example, according to the panelists, they are filmed beautifully. And although the effects are often done on a shoestring (or perhaps because of this), the effects are frequently ingenious.

Mann said that the Godzilla films have a certain charm. (Well, if that were not true, at least for some people, this panel probably would not have happened.) Eggleton said that the Japanese are really into the idea of the "inner child," so the best Godzilla films are made for the child in us.

The rest of the time was just general reminiscences and a mention of the _ K_ a_ i_ j_ u _ R_ e_ v_ i_ e_ w fanzine.

(Shortly after Boskone, Mark and I saw the original _ G_ o_ d_ z_ i_ l_ l_ a-- before they chopped out a bunch of stuff and added Raymond Burr. The original is very different from the American version.)

The Green Room

Unfortunately, there were no really interesting conversations in the Green Room this year. Last year, for example, I came in just in time to hear Esther Friesner say, "Do you have any idea how big a walrus's penis is?!" I guess the era of great Green Room conversations is passing along with other old Boskone traditions.

Leaving

Leaving was much easier this year--no dead battery. We skipped the

Traveler Restaurant Book Cellar; the gimmick of "a free book with every meal" is cute, but the books are of the sort one would find at the end of the day in a rummage sale and the food is undistinguished. Instead we ate at a Chinese restaurant recommended by Jim Mann--okay, but nothing great.

Miscellaneous

(If I went to fewer panels this year, why is my report 15% _ l_ o_ n_ g_ e_ r than last year's?)

Membership seems to have _ f_ i_ r_ m_ l_ y settled in around 900, in spite of the return to the Boston area. Framingham is still not convenient enough to public transportation to show a really big increase over Springfield.

Next year for Boskone 32 (February 17-19, 1995) the Guest of Honor is Diana Wynne Jones.

Mark Leeper
MT 3D-441 908-957-5619
leeper@mtgzfs3.att.com

The typical American of today has lost all the love of liberty that his forefathers had, and all their digust of emotion, and pride in self-reliance. He is led no longer by Davy Crocketts; he is led by cheer leaders, press agents, word-mongers, uplifters.
-- H. L. Mencken