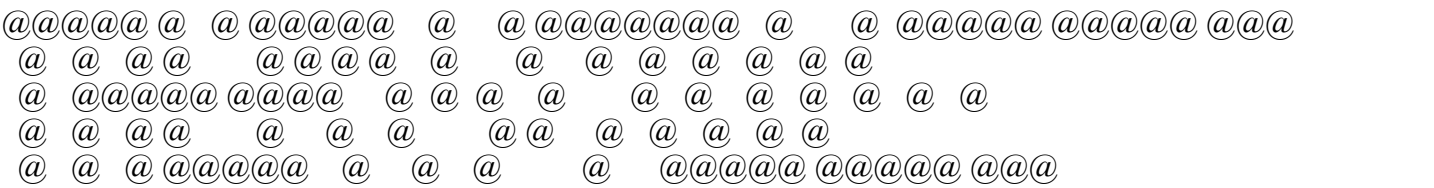

Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
Club Notice - 5/13/94 -- Vol. 12, No. 46

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

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

_D_A_T_E	_T_O_P_I_C
06/01	GREEN MARS by Kim Stanley Robinson (Hugo Nominee)
06/22	Hugo-nominated short stories
07/13	MOVING MARS by Greg Bear (Hugo Nominee)
08/03	GLORY SEASON by David Brin (Hugo Nominee)
08/24	VIRTUAL LIGHT by William Gibson (Hugo Nominee)

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.

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1. These days America no longer seems to have the technological edge that it once had. But France also appears to be losing a kind of reputation. At one time the French were thought to be a fairly sexy people. Foreigners would go to France for what was called a "good time." Of course it is hard to tell how deserved that reputation was since most of the people going to France were the English. Having been twice to the vacation center of Brighton,

England, I can tell you that it doesn't take a whole lot to make the English _t_h_i_n_k they are having a good time. Beach-sitting and a mediocre fun pier is about all there is. Now take a hamburger that dogs wouldn't eat in Jersey City, and even aptly call it a "wimpy burger," and you can make a fortune in England. Hey it's got to be

better than eating grilled kidney, isn't it?

England's standard of immorality is the (male) Member of Parliament who thinks it is terribly, terribly smashing to wear women's foundation garments. George Bernard Shaw pointed out "An Englishman thinks he is moral when he is only uncomfortable." Even in his time there were a lot of these "moral" people in England. So being next to England it is not surprising that France has a reputation as being a wild place to be. Just about any country (but maybe Saudi Arabia) could get that reputation just by being the country to where the English escape.

Anyway, France used to be the place to go for a wild time. It was the home of the Moulin Rouge, the Folies-Bergere, the Can-Can, and other institutions too tame for HBO. Paris was the City of Love. It has always been a racy place, and it stayed that way as the rest of the world became more explicit. Now, however, a Paris company is trying to get the edge on both love and technology. I will go into that next week.

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2. WILL THE LAST PERSON TO LEAVE THE PLANET PLEASE SHUT OFF THE SUN? by Mike Resnick (Tor, ISBN 0-312-85276-2, 1992, 353pp, US$19.95) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

This collection contains twenty-eight of Mike Resnick's short stories, including several Hugo- and Nebula-award nominated (and winning) stories. And it has all the pluses of many of Resnick's anthologies (for which I might note he was just nominated for another Hugo, this time as Best Pro Editor)--and all the minuses.

On the plus side there are some outstanding stories, including

"Kirinyaga" (winner of the Hugo for Best Short Story, and nominated for the Nebula for Best Novelette--don't ask me to explain the rules!), "For I Have Touched the Sky" (nominated for both the Nebula and the Hugo for Best Novelette), "Winter Solstice," (nominated for the Hugo for Best Short Story), and "The Light That Blinds, the Claws That Catch," and "Winter Solstice." The first two are stories in resnick's "Kirinyaga" cycle--and one hopes the entire series will be collected in a single volume. (The latest, "A Little Knowledge," is in the April issue of _A_s_i_m_o_v'_s _S_c_i_e_n_c_e _F_i_c_t_i_o_n, and is already on my list of stories to nominate for the Hugo next year.) "Winter Solstice" won the "Alexander" (the award of the Science Fiction Club at AT&T--named for Alexander Graham Bell, of course). "The Light That Blinds, the Claws That Catch" is an alternate history of what might have happened if Theodore Roosevelt's wife had not died in childbirth in 1884. Resnick has written several alternate Teddy Roosevelt stories, but unlike his "Kirinyaga" stories, these are mutually exclusive rather than

connected.

On the minus side is the sheer volume of stories, which means that it's almost inevitable that some will be primarily filler material. Whether it's better to get more stories or a higher percentage of great stories is a matter for debate, I suppose, but the lower quality of some of the pieces tends to bring the overall rating of the collection down. And Resnick's introductions to the stories, while frequently enlightening, can also be irritating. No one can introduce twenty-eight of their own pieces in a row without beginning to sound just a little self-aggrandizing, so I suppose this may be inevitable. On the other hand, reading this book a bit at a time instead of straight through would probably solve this problem, and Resnick doesn't give away any surprises in them (an occasional failing elsewhere). If nothing else, his introduction to "Kirinyaga" serves to remind us that there's probably some _g_r_e_a_t stuff buried in _L_a_s_t _D_a_n_g_e_r_o_u_s _V_i_s_i_o_n_s.

On balance, I recommend this collection. It _i_s the definitive collection of the short fiction of an author who has, in spite, of his own intentions otherwise, found himself one of the leading short story writers of the last decade, and provides a wide sample

of his work.

[Resnick has again been nominated for the Hugo for Best Short Story this year for "Mwalimu in the Squared Circle" in addition to his nomination as Best Pro Editor. This makes eight Hugo nominations with two wins for his writing, and six Nebula nominations, not counting this year's which I don't seem to have anywhere.]

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3. Lunacon '94 (part 2 of 3) (an abbreviated con report by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Alternate Religion in SF and Fantasy
Saturday, 11AM
John Boardman, Mary Frey, Nancy C. Hanger,
Simon Lang, John Lee, Nancy Springer

I got to this a little bit late, and had a heck of a time matching up participants' names to people on the panel, probably because I didn't realize that Simon Lang was a woman.

Though the topic was alternate religions, there was much discussion of present-day Earth religions (mostly Western religions), as you will see. The panel began by defining religion as the "organized worship of a deity." I guess that means that Buddhism, which has no deity per se, is not a religion. Note that this definition also makes a distinction between religion and faith.

Boardman proposed the idea that many writers are anti-clerical and use alternate religions as a safety net--they can attack a non-existent religion to avoid getting into trouble by attacking a real one. He gave as an example a Philip Jose Farmer story that satirized Judaism in a post-holocaust world--if anyone knows the name of that story, please let me know. Boardman also claimed later that Glen Cook didn't care for any religion because he has several fighting each other--which is not at all the conclusion that I believe one should draw from that. In any case, even with fictional religions, it is sometimes hard to get that part of the

story past the editor and the sales force.

Someone from the audience asked if a people's "aspect" (appearance?) affects their interface with infinity. Someone else said something about how people must "realize there's no order without an orderer," an old--and not very respected--argument for the existence of God. Lang said that religions all had three parts: pathway, propitiation, and fertility. She felt that a society certainly affected a religion, saying, "Religions are created as mirrors to society." (As you can tell, non sequiturs abounded here, as "answers" from the panel often had little or nothing to do with the questions, and the whole hour had a very stream-of-consciousness feel.)

Someone asked what effect the discovery of alien life will/would have on our view of religion or God. From the answers, it was clear that the panelists thought only of Western religions when thinking of "our religions," since they commented that aliens who had six arms would probably have six-armed gods, and that we would have to deal with the aliens' view(s) of deity. First, this sounds like an answer to the first question in the last paragraph, and second, this assumes that there are no religions on Earth that have such gods. One can only assume that the Hindu pantheon (for example) is as alien to the panelists as, well, _a_l_i_e_n pantheons would be. Lang did answer the question ("how will we deal with the aliens' view of deity?") by saying we would "ignore it, despise it, or make war on it." Later people noted that in religion, it often seems that the closer a religion is to ours, the less we tolerate it, and that the most violent wars are against "heretics" rather than "pagans."

A long digression on the conflicting views of Jesuits and Franciscans ensued, reinforcing my opinion of the Western (and even more specifically Christian) emphasis of the panel.

Someone (probably in a desperate attempt to get back on-topic) asked what an author does when inventing a religion. A panelist said that when Stephen Donaldson was asked this, he responded, "We are writers, we can invent; we don't have to do research." Nevertheless, the panelists felt that authors do research religion in general for commonalities that could be used (the pathway,

propitiation, and fertility aspects mentioned earlier, for example).

It seems to be possible, one person averred, to separate religions into two types: the type that says, "God is out there somewhere," and the type that says, "God is next door and you can visit him." I'm not sure whether these are differences between religions, or between different types of faith. (Remember that at the beginning there was a distinction made between religion and faith.)

Missionaries and their place in all this were mentioned. L. Sprague de Camp wrote a story that used an analogy to represent missionaries (according to one panelist--I guess this was an example of trying to couch an anti-church bias in different terms). In the story, humans meet a saurian race that uses body paint the way we use clothing. The clothing market on Earth sees this as a great chance to open a new market and goes off to sell clothes to the saurians. When they return to Earth, however, they find that the saurians have convinced humans to stop wearing clothing and use paint instead. Unfortunately, I can think of no similar situation where religion A goes off to convert people from religion B, and vice versa--and both are successful.

Many of the "side-effects" of religion were mentioned. For example, monarchies depend on the "divine right of kings"--without gods, there would be no monarchies, at least in the sense we know them. Hanger claimed that in addition all "higher" civilizations had or have a benevolent deity, but since she didn't define "higher" I suspect this turns out to be true because "higher" turns out to be those civilizations that have a benevolent diety.

Someone in the audience complained that fantasy novels almost always have everyone believing the same thing--there don't seem to be any denominations on these other worlds. One of the panelists claimed this was true in the Middle Ages (I would argue that it was not--it's just that we ignore a lot of the distinctions or sects that were eventually wiped out), but also agreed that a lot of it was either laziness or economy on the part of the author. If the story isn't about doctrinal differences, adding them to it just complicates things unnecessarily.

As to whether a culture _a_l_w_a_y_s develops a religion, one person claimed that even gorillas have ritual dances to the moon. (I don't find this ultimately convincing.) Another quoted Disraeli as having said, "We all believe in some sort of a something somewhere." James P. Hogan's _W_o_r_l_d _f_r_o_m _Y_e_s_t_e_r_y_e_a_r was cited as a book in which the society has no religion. Lang observed that there might even be belief systems that we failed to recognize as religions in real life, but if a book were that subtle it wouldn't work, because that would defeat the purpose of having it in there. And we have a definite tendency to label anything we don't

understand as religious in nature: if we dig up an artifact that we can't think of a specific purpose for, we say it is a ritual object. David Macaulay's _M_o_t_e_l_o_f_t_h_e_M_y_s_t_e_r_i_e_s is the perfect satire on this tendency.

Someone suggested that if we contacted aliens, their religion might become the "religion du jour," as many people either adopted it, or combined it with ours. Certainly on our world, religions have adopted parts of other religions as they encountered them. (Someone--I think it was Boardman--said that Rose Kennedy, a _v_e_r_y devout Catholic, once fired a maid for dumping dishwater down the back steps and insulting the "little people.")

Another theory of civilization and religion put forward by Boardman was that increased "civilization" results in the diminution of the number of gods. While it is true that originally Judaism didn't claim that there existed only one God, merely that Jews should worship only one, I think the generalization of this is totally wrong. First of all, we need a metric to determine what is "more" or "less" civilized. (Of course, this hearkens back to Hanger's claim earlier that all "higher" civilizations had or have a benevolent deity, with exactly the same stumbling block.) And second, the obvious extrapolation of this is that the most advanced civilization would have no gods. Actually, the correct answer is that the most advanced civilization would have exactly the number of gods that exist, and any claim by someone as to what this would be is colored by their opinion of the number of gods that _t_h_e_y think exist. However, someone else thought that the diminution of the number of gods was merely a consolidation of the various aspects into a single persona, and didn't represent a radically different view of the godhead.

The panel closed with the observation that one thing was predictable: as we meet more people (and aliens) who are different, we will probably become "more" of our own religion. This has been the pattern in the past, and one might consider it the spiritual equivalent of "pulling the wagons into a circle" as a means of defense.

The Once King: the Historical Arthur
Saturday, 1PM
Nancy C. Hanger (mod), John Boardman, Marina Frants,
Roberta Gellis, Debra Meskys, Jane T. Sibley

Two books were recommended at the start of this panel: _ T_ h_ e _ A_ r_ t_ h_ u_ r_ i_ a_ n _ E_ n_ c_ y_ c_ l_ o_ p_ e_ d_ i_ a by Norris J. Lacy (1986, 649 pages) and _ T_ h_ e _ K_ i_ n_ g _ A_ r_ t_ h_ u_ r _ C_ o_ m_ p_ a_ n_ i_ o_ n by Phyllis Ann Karr (1983, 174 pages) though they are more about literature than about the historical Arthur. (Actually, there is a 1991 revised and expanded version of the Lacy called _ T_ h_ e _ N_ e_ w _ A_ r_ t_ h_ u_ r_ i_ a_ n _ E_ n_ c_ y_ c_ l_ o_ p_ e_ d_ i_ a and having 577 pages--and, yes, I know that's _ f_ e_ w_ e_ r pages than the "unexpanded" version.)

Meskys's magazine _ N_ e_ i_ k_ a_ s had a special Arthurian issue which is out of print now, but scheduled to be reprinted.

The panelists talked about their experiences with the various literary versions of the King Arthur story. Boardman said he was turned off by Tennyson's _ I_ d_ y_ l_ l_ s _ o_ f _ t_ h_ e _ K_ i_ n_ g, but turned on by Malory's _ M_ o_ r_ t_ e _ d'_ A_ r_ t_ h_ u_ r, even though he agrees that Malory is grossly anachronistic. Meskys liked T. H. White's _ O_ n_ c_ e _ a_ n_ d _ F_ u_ t_ u_ r_ e _ K_ i_ n_ g, which she described as being a sort of "alternate timeline." She also recommended Mary Stewart's trilogy _ C_ r_ y_ s_ t_ a_ l _ C_ a_ v_ e, _ T_ h_ e _ H_ o_ l_ l_ o_ w _ H_ i_ l_ l_ s, and _ T_ h_ e _ L_ a_ s_ t _ E_ n_ c_ h_ a_ n_ t_ m_ e_ n_ t. As she put it, "Stewart really makes it believable." Gellis said she liked Malory and Coleridge. (If Coleridge did something on King Arthur, I can't find it.) Silby likes them all.

Boardman sees Arthur as an archetype. When the panelists discussed why other "heroes" were not as popular, Gellis said that Arthur was more sympathetic than most, and gave the example of Charlemagne as an unsympathetic hero. (Boskone XXVI in 1989 even had a panel titled "Why Not Charlemagne?"--I will not include all my comments on that here!) Sibley notes that Arthur is also British, and hence "home-grown" to most English-speaking readers. (I suppose this displays a certain Anglocentrism in her/our view of the world.

This tendency of preferring "home-grown" heroes explains why the Golem of Prague is much more popular among Jewish science fiction fans than among the fannish population at large.) Gellis thought that in addition, the Arthurian story is more cheerful than the French epics or other contenders. And the panelists noted that one of the major sources of strife in the Arthurian legend, Lancelot, was a purely literary invention, and was probably added by the French. In terms of the historical Arthur, Lancelot represents a merging of Gawain and Mordred, particularly as described in Geoffrey of Monmouth's version from the 12th Century.

Hanger sees Arthur's appeal as being a noble yet tragic hero in a story of love and betrayal. For all his virtues, Arthur also has human faults. She sees him as a "continuation" of the Irish hero Cuchulain (pronounced "koo-hoo'-lin"). (It was noted in this discussion that Irish--Gaelic--is even less phonetic than English, and that the Norse idiom for "It's Greek to me" is "He's talking Irish." On the other hand, I am a bit sceptical of someone who pronounces Celtic as "sel'-tik.") Classic Greek tragic heroes had their fatal flaws (Oedipus had his hubris, for example), and even the gods had their fatal flaws: Achilles's heel, Baldur's susceptibility to mistletoe, etc. One of the causes of Arthur's downfall was his seduction by his half-sister, which was a literary addition, not by Malory, but some time around the 13th Century. One theory proposed was that this was added to suggest to the reader/listener that you always have the seeds of your own destruction within you. (And Galahad was added because the Church didn't want the "morally questionable" Lancelot as the hero.)

Another theory was that the incest motif was added because Mordred's claim to the kingship was originally as Arthur's sister's son, a lineage valid in Celtic law but not in English law. Therefore, English readers/listeners of the Middle Ages would not be able to make sense of Mordred's claim to the throne, so a direct claim was added.

Panelists discussed the many cultures that have a sleeper or sleeping king who will return in times of trouble (the Golem again?). One person mentioned Fletcher Pratt's _ L_ a_ n_ d _ o_ f _ U_ n_ r_ e_ a_ s_ o_ n as having this theme; someone else suggested that Jesus was another

"sleeping king." From this thought someone else was reminded that Arthur also ordered a slaughter of infants, which most people thought would not make a popular story (though it was claimed James Morrow was the ideal person to write it).

Hanger said one of the main problems with studying Arthur is the proliferation of badly researched books that are attempting to jump on a bandwagon rather than increase the knowledge of the subject. Even respected authors seem to have gone astray. From the beginning, William of Malmesbury's account differed from Geoffrey of Monmouth's. More recently, Norma Lorre Goodrich claimed that the French word that is translated as "bird" in most texts should really be translated as "altar" (or maybe it was the other way around). The Round Table was a 19th Century addition to the legend (I'm not sure this is correct--at least one source I read attributes it to Malory in the 15th Century), yet that is what most people know the best. The romance between Guinevere and Lancelot is from Cretien de Troyes in the 12th Century. And who knows what else people think of that was only introduced in the Lerner & Lowe musical? (Certainly the reference to stopping for a cup of tea was grossly anachronistic there!) But since even the earliest sources dispute the dates of Arthur's life and death, it is impossible to be completely accurate. One theory is that some of the events attributed to Arthur may actually have been connected with a son or nephew also named Arthur.

On the other hand, do we really want or care about historical accuracy? Gellis thinks not. What we want, according to her, is to fulfill the goal of the Society for Creative Anachronism--"to celebrate the Middle Ages as it should have been."

There was a dispute between Gellis (who claimed the sacrificial elements in the Arthur story were Christian) and Sibley (who claimed they were Celtic). As a disinterested bystander, I might claim that they are both, because the concept of sacrifice, and in particular sacrifice of/by the leader of the community, is a common thread through many religions. (I think the panelists also mentioned this, and suggested _ T_ h_ e _ G_ o_ l_ d_ e_ n _ B_ o_ u_ g_ h by Sir James Frazer as a basic text about comparative religion; Frazer is best known for his theory of the sacrifice of the priest-king as archetypal

across cultures.) Boardman described this as "government strong enough to protect us and just enough not to oppress us"--one can't help but feel that he has a definite political agenda here, but the concept of a "benevolent monarchy" has appealed to people in the past.

All this is similar to the tales of Robin Hood, which tend to be added to, modified, and moved around in time. Another similar hero who transcends time and space seems to be the Flying Dutchman, also found as Peter Rugg and even Charlie of the MTA.

The movie _ K_ n_ i_ g_ h_ t_ r_ i_ d_ e_ r_ s was given as an updating of the Arthur legend worth seeing. Marion Zimmer Bradley's _ M_ i_ s_ t_ s _ o_ f _ A_ v_ a_ l_ o_ n got favorable mention, as did William Mayne's _ E_ a_ r_ t_ h_ f_ a_ s_ t_ s, and also _ T_ h_ e _ C_ h_ i_ l_ d _ Q_ u_ e_ e_ n by Nancy MacKenzie, due out in August.

(Note to convention program planners: Nancy Hanger is very good at "taking the panel back" from panelists who tend to monopolize it; I recommend her as a moderator.)

Reinventing the Wheel of If: Alternate History
Saturday, 3PM
Moshe Feder (mod), John Boardman, Evelyn C. Leeper, Vonda N. McIntyre, Mark Olson, Christopher Rowley

[Thanks to Mark, who took notes for me for this panel.]

There were the usual introductions. People who have read my various Boskone reports know that Olson is a long-time fan of alternate histories, and Boardman, McIntyre, and Rowley are well-known authors. Feder is the editor of the Military Book Club.

We began with definitions. I said that an alternate history, for me, has to be something grounded in a historical change. Just saying that it's the same world except that magic works, for example, does not make an alternate history (which is not to say that those can't be enjoyable--I loved Esther Friesner's _ D_ r_ u_ i_ d'_ s _ B_ l_ o_ o_ d, which falls into this category). Why is it science fiction? Well, you could do some hand-waving and say that it is because the changes are caused by changes at the quantum level, etc., but the fact is that alternate history stories are science fiction because science fiction fans read them. (This is addressed later--stay tuned.) Boardman said that he started reading alternate histories with such stories as Sir Winston Churchill's "If Lee had not Won the Battle of Gettysburg," something by Anatole France (though I can't find any Anatole France stories in the Usenet alternate history bibliography), and Murray Leinster's "Sidewise in Time," which were the stories that got the field moving and got people thinking how nice things would be if they had turned out differently. Olson said that he started with L. Sprague de Camp's _ L_ e_ s_ t_ D_ a_ r_ k_ n_ e_ s_ s_ F_ a_ l_ l and Mark Twain's _ C_ o_ n_ n_ e_ c_ t_ i_ c_ u_ t _ Y_ a_ n_ k_ e_ e _ i_ n _ K_ i_ n_ g

_ A_ r_ t_ h_ u_ r'_ s _ C_ o_ u_ r_ t. (Boardman noted that in the latter all the changes were eventually negated, so perhaps it should be classified as a secret history rather than an alternate history.)

Feder wanted to make a distinction between worlds in which the change is a given, and those in which someone is doing the changes. Well, yes, you can split them that way, but to what purpose? (I guess the latter imply time travel, while the former don't.)

Rowley felt that in today's market--presumably meaning readers who were historical literate as well as science fiction fans--you needed to work out your consequences well. When alternate histories were young, the novelty would carry them to some extent, but today everyone is looking closely at exactly what happens in your story after you decide to have the Manhattan Project fail (or whatever). For that matter, they are also looking at _ w_ h_ y your Manhattan Project fails, and if _ t_ h_ a_ t makes sense. Olson agreed that this attention to detail was what made a novel such as Harry Turtledove's _ G_ u_ n_ s _ o_ f _ t_ h_ e _ S_ o_ u_ t_ h such a good book, and that even though he (Olson) wasn't a Civil War buff, he could appreciate it. He also felt that Turtledove did a good job of presenting a balanced view of the South, as opposed to what one used to see in less sophisticated alternate histories (or for that matter, probably still do in some markets). (There was some concern that we were revealing too much of the plot in discussing the book, but I don't think the key points were actually supposed to be kept a secret.)

Someone in the audience asked if there were any alternate histories in which Charles I won the English Civil War. Yes-- John Whitbourn's _ A _ D_ a_ n_ g_ e_ r_ o_ u_ s _ E_ n_ e_ r_ g_ y (that chronological listing by divergence is _ r_ e_ a_ l_ l_ y useful for questions like this!) Someone else said that everyone does the same old thing, giving the example that no one has Germany winning World War _ I. Immediately several people jumped on that, mentioning among other stories, Fritz Leiber's "Catch That Zeppelin." Other stories with this premise include Tom Purdom's "Redemption of August," Stephen Leacock's "If Germany Had Won," and Guido Morselli's _ P_ a_ s_ t _ C_ o_ n_ d_ i_ t_ i_ o_ n_ a_ l: _ A _ R_ e_ t_ r_ o_ s_ p_ e_ c_ t_ i_ v_ e

_ H_ y_ p_ o_ t_ h_ e_ s_ i_ s. But Feder agreed that World War II was far more popular, no doubt because it was bigger and "juicier." Also, Americans don't understand World War I. We came in late in the war, it happened a long time ago, and it happened somewhere else. Feder gave the example that there might be some fascinating critical points in Japanese history but he hasn't read enough to know what they are. Conversely, the common change points are overdone because authors just don't know enough of any other history.

Someone suggested that we should "talk favorites." Rowley's included Philip K. Dick's _ M_ a_ n _ i_ n _ t_ h_ e _ H_ i_ g_ h _ C_ a_ s_ t_ l_ e and Keith Roberts's _ P_ a_ v_ a_ n_ e. Olson repeated that Turtledove's _ G_ u_ n_ s _ o_ f _ t_ h_ e

_ S_ o_ u_ t_ h was very good. Boardman said that he liked James P. Hogan's _ P_ r_ o_ t_ e_ u_ s _ P_ r_ o_ j_ e_ c_ t, "which gives you three alternate histories for the price of one." He particularly liked that Hogan told us why he was writing it--that he had read a claim that Germany was rebuilt as a bulwark against Communism. (Of course, that's why the Church backed Nazi Germany during the 1930s, after all.) I mentioned Ward Moore's _ B_ r_ i_ n_ g _ t_ h_ e _ J_ u_ b_ i_ l_ e_ e as a classic, though other panel members didn't think it was very good. (Well, I didn't like _ T_ h_ e _ M_ a_ n _ i_ n _ t_ h_ e _ H_ i_ g_ h _ C_ a_ s_ t_ l_ e that much, so I guess it evens out.) I also recommended Gregory Benford and Martin H. Greenberg' first two anthologies _ W_ h_ a_ t _ M_ i_ g_ h_ t _ H_ a_ v_ e _ B_ e_ e_ n _ 1 and _ 2 and Mike Resnick's _ A_ l_ t_ e_ r_ n_ a_ t_ e _ P_ r_ e_ s_ i_ d_ e_ n_ t_ s and _ A_ l_ t_ e_ r_ n_ a_ t_ e _ K_ e_ n_ n_ e_ d_ y_ s. (I didn't think his later _ A_ l_ t_ e_ r_ n_ a_ t_ e _ W_ a_ r_ r_ i_ o_ r_ s or _ B_ y _ A_ n_ y _ O_ t_ h_ e_ r _ F_ a_ m_ e were that good.)

Feder asked if there were any alternate histories in which Christianity doesn't rise to prominence and "Rome goes Jewish"? Boardman immediately responded yes, and I was able to add that there was one by Kim Newman Eugene Byrne in Brian Stableford's _ T_ a_ l_ e_ s _ o_ f _ t_ h_ e _ W_ a_ n_ d_ e_ r_ i_ n_ g _ J_ e_ w called, perhaps not surprisingly, "The Wandering Christian." McIntyre mentioned John M. Ford's _ D_ r_ a_ g_ o_ n _ W_ a_ i_ t_ i_ n_ g in which Christianity is a minor, almost unknown cult.

Boardman again brought up the point made earlier by Feder that there are two kinds of alternate histories, one with time travel and one without--or rather, one in which the change is internal and one in which the changes are made by time travelers.

McIntyre pointed out that changes occurring a thousand years ago make even five hundred years ago unrecognizable. Feder agreed that this led to a certain artificiality in alternate history stories, where they have to follow only one change, but history wouldn't work like that. Boardman gave the example of a world in which the South won the Civil War, but all the (Northern) Presidents were the same--this is _ e_ x_ t_ r_ e_ m_ e_ l_ y unlikely. I again mentioned _ D_ r_ u_ i_ d'_ s _ B_ l_ o_ o_ d, in which the change was long, long ago, yet most of the famous people in our 18th Century have exact parallels in that world. Of course, I am willing to forgive that (maybe because the book is intended humorously rather than as a serious study), but am annoyed when I see it in a more serious work.

This led Feder to ask the panelists' most and least favorite mistakes. Olson said his was forgetting that history goes on. Though it's true that China remained moderately static for a long time, it is also unlikely that a Rome that didn't fall sixteen hundred years ago would still look the same today. Boardman disliked when the change was caused by something silly (and gave the example _ B_ r_ i_ n_ g _ t_ h_ e _ J_ u_ b_ i_ l_ e_ e, though that didn't strike me as based on a silly change).

I said that what bothered me the most was that authors don't seem to understand causes and they don't seem to understand effects.

That is, they make changes that won't bring about the scenario they have, and they have some things remain static that certainly would have been changed. My standard example of the latter is a world in which World War II never happened, yet John Kennedy is still elected President in 1960. Of course, having said that, I also confessed that Robert Silverberg's "Via Roma," set in a 19th Century Rome which never fell, avoided these pitfalls (with a couple of very minor slips) but the result was a story that left me

nothing familiar to grab on to or relate to. With me, you're damned if you do and damned if you don't. Rowley suggested that this may be another reason why World War II and the American Civil War are used so often--they were recent enough that the resulting world of 1994 would have something recognizable. (Regarding World War II, Boardman said that even without Hitler, there would have been World War II, but no Holocaust. He figured Hugenberg might have been in control.)

McIntyre asked if anyone had read Peter Dickinson's stories in which Edward Duke of Clarence did not die in 1887 and went on to become King of England instead of his younger brother George. (So far there have been two: _K_i_n_g_ a_n_d_ J_o_k_e_r and _S_k_e_l_e_t_o_n-_i_n-_W_a_i_t_i_n_g.) There were also mentions of Avram Davison's _A_d_v_e_n_t_u_r_e_s_ i_n_ U_n_h_i_s_t_o_r_y, which Olson recommended for a Hugo this year.

Feder suggested that there are two ways to write an alternate history: as a conventional story, or as a textbook-style description. In the latter category, the outstanding example is Robert Sobel's _F_o_r_ W_a_n_t_ o_f_ a_ N_a_i_l...; _I_f_ B_u_r_g_o_y_n_e_ H_a_d_ W_o_n_ a_t_ S_a_r_a_t_o_g_a, a 1973 book which assumes Burgoyne beat Gates at Saratoga and the American rebellion collapsed. It is a full-length history text of the "Confederation of North America" and the "United States of Mexico," complete with completely fictitious bibliography and completely fictitious publishing information on the copyright page! Why someone doesn't reprint this, I don't know--it is marvelous!

It was mentioned that Harry Turtledove, in addition to his "Worldwar" series, was working on an alternate history in which there was no American Revolution. Called _T_h_e_ T_w_o_ G_e_o_r_g_e_s, it is being co-authored with Richard Dreyfuss. Olson noted that there was a famous painting by Gainsborough called "The Two Georges"; I added that people on the Net were already suggesting that it should be used as the cover art.

Someone in the audience asked about _F_a_t_h_e_r_l_a_n_d (by Robert Harris). This and Turtledove's _G_u_n_s_o_f_t_h_e_S_o_u_t_h have become the best-known alternate histories in the last few years. (The announcement that _F_a_t_h_e_r_l_a_n_d is "soon to be a major motion picture" didn't hurt it.) Rowley said that he thought _F_a_t_h_e_r_l_a_n_d was good; it was "coherent and pretty believable." I mentioned that earlier Len Deighton had written _S_S-_G_B along similar lines.

Feder asked if we imagined our own history as an alternate world, where did we go wrong? Rowley suggested that the invention of gunpowder was a bad idea. Olson pointed out that since we are all the results of this world and its population explosion, he isn't too thrilled with changing things. McIntyre felt that she would like to change the contempt of the Christian church for women. Boardman thought that the status of women had reached a nadir in the 19th Century (at least in Western civilization), and that now only was it better now than a century ago, but it had been better earlier as well. He also asked if anyone knew of a non-religious argument against feminism.

I noted that much of what is wrong with the world is also what brings about progress, and I want to know if I get rid of the Black Death, what am I getting instead? Olson added that the Black Death freed Europe from being static (like China).

After all this discussion, the panel agreed that one thing science fiction and alternate histories have in common is that they are both about world-building. Classical science fiction changes the physical constraints; alternate histories change the historical. So maybe this "world-building" is the science fiction/alternate history connection.

Someone in the audience asked about the 14th and 15th Century Chinese explorations--what if they had reached Europe? Boardman thought they were probably referring to the Yuan (Mongol) Dynasty which was from 1279 to 1368. Of course, it wasn't as if China didn't know about Europe. As someone asked, "Did you ever hear of Marco Polo?" Olson felt that the expansion was doomed because the emperor required too much control. McIntyre asked what might have happened if the Chinese had gotten across the Pacific. This was deemed somewhat unlikely unless they went via Alaska--the Pacific Ocean is _ v_ e_ r_ y wide. Olson added that had the Chinese gotten to North America, they might have released horses there, and that would have made a difference, since all native American horses had gone extinct before the Spaniards arrived. Boardman said he thought the Appaloosa of the Nez Perce tribe was a native breed that had not become extinct during the Ice Ages, but I don't believe that is true. According to _ G_ r_ o_ l_ i_ e_ r'_ s _ A_ c_ a_ d_ e_ m_ i_ c _ O_ n-_ L_ i_ n_ e _ E_ n_ c_ y_ c_ l_ o_ p_ e_ d_ i_ a, for example, "the [Nez Perce] Plateau culture acquired Plains traits after the introduction (c. 1700) of the horse simulated trade and war contacts." (As an observation, this means that some of the "traditional" culture that the Europeans are accused of destroying was in fact created by their presence as well.)

Someone wanted to get back to the Chinese Khan whose fleet was sunk in a storm. (Feder noted that storms seem to stop armadas in many cultures.) Someone else said that the Khan Dynasty (Mongol Dynasty?) extended all the way to the Caspian Sea, and the Chinese

were well aware of Europe. (Well, we knew that.) Feder said he thought the original question would have been better phrased as referring to oceanic contact with other civilizations.

An audience member said that it seemed to him as if most alternate histories were based on some violent premise (although I'm not sure the non-existence of a war could properly be termed that), and asked if there were any based on non-violent events. Well of course there are dozens, probably hundreds, based on changes in scientific discoveries, etc., but a recent source might be Mike Resnick's _ A_ l_ t_ e_ r_ n_ a_ t_ e _ P_ r_ e_ s_ i_ d_ e_ n_ t_ s anthology, which looks at what might have happened if various Presidential elections or other events turned out differently. Boardman thought that most of the stories were wildly improbable (I have to agree that the premise that Victoria Woodhull might have been elected President in 1872 is extremely unlikely). Feder mentioned a story in which Lincoln becomes a sad and forgotten man, but I don't think he gave the title or author. (It could possibly be Lloyd Lewis's "If Lincoln Had Lived" or Oscar Lewis's "The Lost Years: A Biographical Fantasy.") Olson said that de Camp's _ L_ e_ s_ t _ D_ a_ r_ k_ n_ e_ s_ s _ F_ a_ l_ l eliminates the "Dark Ages" through technology. Someone noted that Carl Sagan had once asked what might have happened if the ancient Greeks had not become mystical. Olson responded that it wasn't mysticism; it was that they made experimental science lower class.

[End of Part 2]

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In this world of sin and sorrow there is always something to be thankful for; as for me, I rejoice that I am not a Republican.

-- H. L. Mencken