

have molded over and are indeed black. It is a phenomenon I have known about, but have been reticent to accept. In any case, two years ago there was no snow to shovel.

THE MT VOID

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I realized I had happened on to one of the great undiscovered forces of the universe. There are strong and weak nuclear forces, gravity, electromagnetism, and Evelyn's luck. So

Last year Evelyn's responsibility became the driveway and ending world tyranny. Again, not enough snow to shovel fell. What did fall was the Berlin Wall. And the KGB. And much of apartheid. It was amazing! Then the question came to mind how to put this really to the test. Curing AIDS? Curing cancer? No, those might be done with single breakthroughs. I wanted something complex. I wanted something that really went beyond the laws of chance. For the winter of 1991 Evelyn was given 1) taking care of the driveway, 2) ending world tyranny, and 3) ...

Peace in the Middle East

And something beyond time and space said, "ARE YOU KIDDING ME? FORGET IT. ALL DEALS ARE OFF."

And war has broken out in the Middle East. And the KGB has been reinstated. There are crackdowns in Eastern Europe.

Yup! And we had to shovel the driveway.

2. Here are this year's Nebula nominations:

- Novels:

- Le Guin, Ursula: T_e_h_a_n_u: T_h_e L_a_s_t B_o_o_k_o_f E_a_r_t_h_s_e_a (Atheneum)
- Martin, Valerie: M_a_r_y R_e_i_l_l_y (Doubleday)
- Morrow, James: O_n_l_y B_e_g_o_t_t_e_n D_a_u_g_h_t_e_r (Morrow)
- Simmons, Dan: T_h_e F_a_l_l_o_f H_y_p_e_r_i_o_n (Doubleday/Foundation)
- Stith, John E: R_e_d_s_h_i_f_t R_e_n_d_e_v_o_u_s (Ace)
- Yolen, Jane: W_h_i_t_e J_e_n_n_a (Tor)

- Novella:

- Bujold, Lois McMaster: "Weatherman" (A_n_a_l_o_g)
- Cadigan, Pat: "Fool to Believe" (A_s_i_m_o_v'_s)
- Haldeman, Joe: "The Hemingway Hoax" (A_s_i_m_o_v'_s)
- Kelly, James Patrick: "Mr. Boy" (A_s_i_m_o_v'_s)
- Murphy, Pat: "Bones" (A_s_i_m_o_v'_s)

- Novelette:

- ab Hugh, Dafydd: "The Coon Rolled Down and Ruptured His Larinks, A Squeezed Novel by Mr. Skunk" (A_s_i_m_o_v'_s)
- Chiang, Ted: "Tower of Babylon" (O_m_n_i)
- Le Guin, Ursula: "The Shobies Story" (U_n_i_v_e_r_s_e_1)
- McLeod, Ian: "1/72nd Scale" (W_e_i_r_d_T_a_l_e_s)
- Resnick, Mike: "The Manamouki" (A_s_i_m_o_v'_s)

THE MT VOID

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- Rusch, Kristine Kathryn: "A Time For Every Purpose" (A_m_a_z_i_n_g)
- Schwartz, Susan: "Loose Cannon" (W_h_a_t_M_i_g_h_t_H_a_v_e_B_e_e_n,_V_o_l_2)
- Soukup, Martha: "Over the Long Haul" (A_m_a_z_i_n_g)

- Short Story:

- Bisson, Terry: "Bears Discover Fire" (A_s_i_m_o_v'_s)
- Cadigan, Pat: "The Power and the Passion" (O_m_n_i)
- Fowler, Karen Joy: "Lieserl" (A_s_i_m_o_v'_s)
- Murphy, Pat: "Love and Sex Among the Invertebrates" (A_l_i_e_n_S_e_x)
- Robinson, Kim Stanley: "Before I Wake" (A_s_i_m_o_v'_s)
- Rusch, Kristine Kathryn: "Story Child" (A_b_o_r_i_g_i_n_a_l_S_F)

Mark Leeper
MT 3D-441 957-5619
...mtgzy!leeper

Man is without any doubt the most interesting fool there is.
Also the most eccentric. He hasn't a single written law,
in his Bible or out of it, which has any but one purpose and
intention--to limit or defeat a law of God.

-- Mark Twain

THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: A dark and fascinating thriller
that is a genuine departure in the depiction of the
psychopathic killer on the screen. Hannibal Lecter is a
screen villain as memorable as Norman Bates. Rating:

high +2 (-4 to +4).

Since 1959 the psychopathic killer has, perhaps unfortunately, become a staple of popular film. Most films that had psychopaths before that point really blurred the distinction between your garden variety murderer and the actual psychopath. Perhaps one notable exception was T_h_e_B_a_d_S_e_e_d, which suggested that there could be something like a "congenital evil." Extreme criminality and madness were very much equated. That was very much what was meant with "mad scientists" of the old horror films. There was an urge to deny the existence of evil or to relegate it to the supernatural. How many people even today deny the culpability of Adolf Hitler and say instead that he was simply mad. There were some films that suggested that there was something more to criminal insanity than just extreme criminality, but it was Alfred Hitchcock's P_s_y_c_h_o that turned the cinematic view around. Norman Bates was himself a victim as well as the perpetrator of his acts. Bates was a normal person twisted by his past and driven by forces he could not control. This is a marvelously egalitarian view of the criminally insane. It assumes that all men (and women) are created equal. This is probably an equally invalid view of the criminally insane. When John Hurt played Caligula in I,_C_l_a_u_d_i_u_s, he described his character as "congenitally bonkers." In all probability that was fairly accurate. It is at least my belief that Caligula was genuinely insane and Hitler was not. This view of the pitiful victim-psychopath became the dominant view in films with P_s_y_c_h_o and it has remained dominant. With John Carpenter's H_a_l_l_o_w_e_e_n (1978) there was a new view, or perhaps an old view harkening back to medieval beliefs, that the psychopathic killer is a supernatural force. Fortunately, few films have picked up on this idea and most that have have large Roman numerals in their titles.

Thomas Harris has a different concept of the psychopathic killer which, if no more credible than the supernatural force, is at least more intriguing. He created the idea in his novel R_e_d_D_r_a_g_o_n, which Michael Mann adapted into his 1986 film M_a_n_h_u_n_t_e_r. The idea was expanded in his S_i_l_e_n_c_e_o_f_t_h_e_L_a_m_b_s, which has been adapted into a film by Jonathan Demme. Harris's concept is that psychopaths have a distinctly different form of intelligence. Their reasoning power is consistent and logical, but alien to our own. If you cannot bridge the gap and think like a psychopath, you are at a distinct disadvantage in dealing with them. In addition, the psychopath often has superhuman sensory powers. For example, Harris's Hannibal Lecter, in addition to a super-intellect,

apparently has a heightened sense of smell. I believe these are ideas that owe their origin more to Poe's "Tell-Tale Heart" than to actual case histories. But where Harris is really superb is in being able to make Lecter's reasoning really seem brilliant. It is extremely difficult to write a character who is supposed to be brilliant. To see how poorly it can be done, try going back and listening to Lex Luthor's reasoning about Kryptonite in S_u_p_e_r_m_a_n (1978). Lecter's reasoning is at once perverted and brilliant.

M_a_n_h_u_n_t_e_r and T_h_e_S_i_l_e_n_c_e_o_f_t_h_e_L_a_m_b_s are two of what have to be at least four stories involving Hannibal Lecter. And they are probably the two least interesting. When R_e_d_D_r_a_g_o_n begins, Lecter has already been captured by Will Graham, who made himself into a psychopath in order to catch Lecter in the first place. Graham needs Lecter's help to capture another psychopath. In T_h_e_S_i_l_e_n_c_e_o_f_t_h_e_L_a_m_b_s, fledging FBI agent Clarice Starling (no pun intended) (played by Jodie Foster) similarly must enlist Lecter's (Anthony Hopkins's) help to find a killer. This time, however, Lecter thinks he can work his own deal. While this story does conclude, there is still a major loose end that really demands yet another story.

In this story the primary villain is a killer whom the press has dubbed Buffalo Bill. The killer not only murders his victims, he later skins them. Starling is chosen to talk to Dr.~Lecter about the crimes with an eye toward getting his unique insight into how to capture Buffalo Bill. Starling, however, has her own personal demons inside and Lecter is just the person to turn those demons against her. In the book the main story is how Starling catches the killer, with the Lecter story being a major subplot. The film reverses the importance of the two plots by leaving the Lecter plot intact, if not actually expanded, and cutting drastically the Buffalo Bill plot.

The character of Lecter seems calculated to play off every anti-intellectual prejudice in the audience. The man is an ice-cold, emotionless intellect. He listens to ice-cold, emotionless music. Even when he kills we are told that he is ice-cold and emotionless. In one chilling detail the character is defined. We are told that he attacked and partially ate a victim without his pulse ever going over 80.

Stylistically the film is well handled generally. At times the music is a bit overly dramatic in underscoring the mood as if Howard Shore, the composer, did not trust Hopkins's acting to convey a mood of menace. If that was the case, the composer was misguided, since Harris's villain will probably be as memorable as Norman Bates and Michael Meyers. The photography uses a filter to subdue the colors. If that was not downbeat enough, Starling is really the only sympathetic character in the whole story. She seems to go from one man to the next who tries to bed her.

For the sake of completeness at least two nits should be mentioned. Starling is first seen climbing a steep hill in the rigorous FBI

training school. When we see her in close-up, she is wearing earrings. For her own safety, at least, you would think they would insist on no jewelry. Also, certain scenes are supposedly seen through an infra-red snooperscope and at least one time the subject is in total darkness. As seen through the scope, even items that do not emit heat are easily seen. In the total darkness scene the subject can not only be seen, but also to be seen is the subject's sharp shadow on the wall.

T_h_e_S_i_l_e_n_c_e_o_f_t_h_e_L_a_m_b_s is as unpleasant and hypnotic as watching a cobra. This is one heavy thriller. I give it a high +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

The Old-Timers Are Back
by Dale L. Skran Jr.
Copyright 1991 Dale L. Skran Jr.

It may seem odd to refer to David Brin and Greg Bear as oldies in the same fashion as Poul Anderson, but they are now such widely recognized Icons of the SF field that the comparison is justified. Bear has won the Hugo for "Blood Music" and Brin for S_t_a_r_t_i_d_e_R_i_s_i_n_g, both solid Anderson-like works of hard SF. Together, Brin and Bear instill a lot of the remaining vitality in the hard SF field. Each novel they write is new and different, with better realized characters than a Forward could ever produce, combined with prose that goes one step beyond Heinlein's workperson-like English.

Further, one of the greatest challenges in SF is the creation of believable novel of the next 50 years. Brin does this in E_a_r_t_h and now Bear has added a companion novel in Q_u_e_e_n_o_f_A_n_g_e_l_s. Poul Anderson has also delivered a new novel of his Time Patrol, T_h_e_S_h_i_e_l_d_o_f_T_i_m_e. All will be eligible for the 1991 Hugo so I felt it appropriate to discuss them together.

T_h_e_S_h_i_e_l_d_o_f_T_i_m_e is the lesser of the three by far. Anderson has really lumped together three novella-length stories. The first follows Manse Everard, Unattached Agent, as he hunts down the last of the Exaltationists, a group of gene-engineered superhumans from the future.

This 50s style adventure is of only modest interest. The second novella follows Wanda Tamberley (Manse's love) through her early experiences as a Time Patrol agent. This section runs at a lower pitch, focusing on the impossibility of saving or helping anyone who's fate is already a certainty. The third section returns to history-shattering events, but with the interesting twist that random quantum fluctuations are responsible for wiping out the Time Patrol's future rather than the machinations of the Exaltationists or other criminals. Overall, a modest non-novel, not on the scale of Anderson's recent and excellent

B_o_a_t_o_f_a_M_i_l_l_i_o_n_Y_e_a_r_s. Recommended only for time-travel and alternate history buffs.

Q_u_e_e_n_o_f_A_n_g_e_l_s makes a solid attempt to put the reader about fifty years in the future (2047). Unlike Brin's world-shattering E_a_r_t_h, Q_u_e_e_n_o_f_A_n_g_e_l_s has an almost microscopic focus on several characters and a police-procedural plot updated to include nano-technology.

Unfortunately, Bear makes the mistake of having one of the characters be an AI coming into self-awareness after arriving in a distant star system. The plot posits that the AI was launched in 2032, an event I consider unlikely in the extreme given the current moribund state of our space program. Although Q_u_e_e_n_o_f_A_n_g_e_l_s has many interesting ideas, I enjoyed Brin's rock-um sock-um E_a_r_t_h (which also had many interesting ideas) far more. Still, both Brin and Bear deserve special attention for daring to write that most difficult of SF novels -- one that takes place about 50 years in the future. Recommended. Has a better shot at the Nebula than the Hugo due to large amounts of stylistic

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experimentation, stream-of-consciousness writing, and detailed characterization.

Brin's E_a_r_t_h has the best shot at the Hugo. Although a vast tome, it becomes increasingly engaging as the reader gets toward the end, and builds toward one of Brin's patented "comic-book" style conclusions. By "comic-book" I mean that it features the clash of mighty forces using E. E. Smith style weapons that would not seem out of place in a Stan Lee comic. Another Brin novel with a "comic-book" ending is T_h_e_P_o_s_t_m_a_n which has two super-strong cyborgs duking it out like pagan gods in the final pages. As always with Brin, the science is well thought out and the society carefully considered. He has clearly been thinking about

_ E_ a_ r_ t_ h for a long time. Recommended. Strong Hugo contender.

SCENES FROM A MALL
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
Copyright 1991 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: If you think it is funny to see adults argue in public, perhaps this comedy is for you. Then again, if you do think so, who knows what else you would like? Another Beverly Hills comedy that makes this Easterner wonder if he is missing the point. Rating: -1 (-4 to +4).

Somebody once told me they thought they could listen to and watch Woody Allen reading white pages out of the phone book and it would be funny. His facial expressions are just so funny that anything he does is just naturally hilarious. Bette Midler can also be very funny. So the question is, how long can this couple play a loving and quarreling couple walking around a mall and still carry the film on their innate cuteness. Well, based on the results in Paul Mazursky's _ S _ c _ e _ n _ e _ s _ f _ r _ o _ m _ a _ M _ a _ l _ l, the two of them might be able to carry the premise for up to about ten minutes. After that, they definitely need an assist from a script and the script in _ S _ c _ e _ n _ e _ s _ f _ r _ o _ m _ a _ M _ a _ l _ l by Roger Simon and director Mazursky does little to help. At least it does little unless you think that everything connected with Beverly Hills is really cute. If your idea of a good joke is seeing a line of cars with each driver talking on a cellular phone, perhaps you will enjoy this film, but I would bet you will find far more on-target and funny in _ L _ A _ S _ t _ o _ r _ y.

On their sixteenth wedding anniversary, lovey-dovey couple Nick (played by Woody Allen) and Deborah (played by Bette Midler) go to a mall on an errand. There they get into a fight over fidelity and decide to break up. They reconcile and decide they still love each other. They fight again and break up. Then they get together again. Can you figure the plot from that point on? Yes, I thought you could. All this fighting and loving is done in front of random strangers. That's what there is. It is a film with a beginning and a middle, but no end. It is just arbitrarily cut off at the end of a cycle. It would be one thing if these people were at least great conversationalists. But this is no _ M _ y _ D _ i _ n _ n _ e _ r _ w _ i _ t _ h _ A _ n _ d _ r _ e. About all you learn from the conversation is that these are two very ordinary and superficial people. Do you really care where they got their roll-top desk and which of them is going to get it in the divorce settlement? I know I do not. You could easily save the admission price by going to your local mall and eavesdropping on the people there.

There are some things that Mazursky is more anxious to show us than others. We do get to see the names of a lot of stores at the mall, many of which--surprise! surprise!--are chains that you might find at your own local mall. How fortuitous for the financing of the film! Considerably less care is taken to show us what the characters are doing

with their packages. At one point each has bought a complete change of clothes which they are wearing. No explanation is given for what happened to the clothes they had been wearing. I guess in Beverly Hills, everything you own is considered disposable.

If you genuinely find great humor in the awkward situation of seeing adults argue in public, this predominantly one-joke comedy might be for you. If not, it offers you surprisingly little considering the names involved. I give it a -1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

Boskone 28
Con report by Evelyn C. Leeper
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[Part 1]

Well, the weather conspired against us, and we ended up driving through four separate blizzard conditions before finally arriving in Springfield at 8 PM. (A large accident and construction along I-91 didn't help, but then, there's been construction along that stretch of I-91 for the past twelve years.)

Registration for panelists was in the regular registration area, rather than the Green Room, and this worked well, since all the flyers and such were there also, and the people had no problem finding the additional packet for each of us with our schedules.

Hotels

The easiest way between the Tara and the Marriott way was out the door and across the street. The only problem with this was that it was (again!) very cold and windy and unless you carted your coat around with you it was not inviting. With the smaller size of Boskone, there is no crowding in the hallways or other common areas any more, and it's possible to find places to just sit and talk.

Dealers' Rooms

Last year I had said, "The setup of having a dealers' room in each

hotel continued, and will for the foreseeable future. There just isn't enough space in any one room to put all the dealers there without seriously impacting the programming." So they made me a liar. Well, only partly. There was only one dealers' room, but they didn't put all the dealers in it. Rather, they put about 75% of the dealers in it; the rest got no space. This didn't make dealers happy either. As far as content, there were several book dealers, but an increasing number who don't alphabetize their stock--making them worthless to me, since I'm always looking for specific things. There was still too much peripheral stuff: jewelry, T-shirts, etc. (My personal opinion--I'm sure others disagree.) Dealers still complained about low sales--the recession is probably as much a culprit as the smaller space or anything else NESFA has control over. I found some items I was looking for, including some rare Anne Rice novels one friend wanted, a Crowley book for another friend, and even some stuff for me. We also bought some old pulps in Treasure Island, a comic store in the mall just outside the Marriott, and a couple of books in Johnson's Bookstore, the main book store in town, and an old favorite from twenty years ago when I lived in the area.

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Art Show

This was better than last year, and there seemed to be more affordable items. It could be that having Worldcon in Boston put a dent in the pieces still around at the time of last year's Boskone.

Film Program

The film program was again very small: T_h_e_T_h_i_n_g (the original), C_a_t_P_e_o_p_l_e (the original), W_i_c_k_e_r_M_a_n, T_h_r_o_n_e_o_f_B_l_o_o_d, N_i_g_h_t_o_f_t_h_e L_i_v_i_n_g_D_e_a_d (the original), some short subjects, and an "Ed Emsh Film festival" (which I would have been interested in, but was busy both times it was shown). Ed Emsh was the Artist Guest of Honor, though sadly he died last July, after he was chosen but well before the convention itself.

Programming

I want my science track back! Boskone used to have a science "guest of honor" (called "featured science speaker," actually), and now they don't even have a science panel. They were supposed to have one on cold fusion, but it was canceled. Well, so was cold fusion, so I suppose it was fitting.

The First Night

After registering and making a first pass through the dealers' room, I went to the "Meet the VIPs" Party, where I spent most of the time talking to Mike Godwin about Usenet and copyright, and Usenet in general. I tried to convince him to start a "rec.arts.books.reviews" group (with little success, I'm afraid). We also had a discussion with Saul Jaffe about whether or not Internet rules allowed him to include the cover price of a book in a review. I brought this up because he did allow a whole discussion about the \$1.95 pricing on Pulphouse short story booklets. Though Mike and I both argued this was inconsistent, Saul did not appear to have changed his mind any, and he is the moderator, so I guess that's that.

I also had a chance to talk to Michael Kandel and tell him how much I enjoyed his S_t_r_a_n_g_e_I_n_v_a_s_i_o_n (which I had meant to bring to get it autographed, but forgot).

Mark went to the "Neglected Authors: Jules Verne" panel, but not the "How Fandom Has Changed in the Last 15 Years" one. His observation on the latter was that one way fandom has changed is that Jules Verne is now a neglected author. He also said that he was disappointed that the panelists seemed to be familiar only with Verne's more popular works, by which I assume he means A_r_o_u_n_d_t_h_e_W_o_r_l_d_i_n_E_i_g_h_t_y_D_a_y_s,_F_r_o_m_t_h_e_E_a_r_t_h_t_o_t_h_e_M_o_o_n,_J_o_u_r_n_e_y_t_o_t_h_e_C_e_n_t_e_r_o_f_E_a_r_t_h,_M_a_s_t_e_r_o_f_t_h_e_W_o_r_l_d,_T_h_e_M_y_s_t_e_r_i_o_u_s_I_s_l_a_n_d,_T_o_t_h_e_S_u_n,_O_f_f_o_n_a_C_o_m_e_t,and_T_w_e_n_t_y_T_h_o_u_s_a_n_d_L_e_a_g_u_e_s_U_n_d_e_r_t_h_e_S_e_a. No mention was made of even the works which Ace published in mass market paperback twenty years ago: T_h_e_B_e_g_u_m's_F_o_r_t_u_n_e,_T_h_e_C_a_r_p_a_t_h_i_a_n_C_a_s_t_l_e,_C_i_t_y_i_n_t_h_e_S_a_h_a_r_a,_I_n_t_o_t_h_e_N_i_g_e_r_B_e_n_d,

T_i_g_e_r_s & T_r_a_i_t_o_r_s, T_h_e
U_n_d_e_r_g_r_o_u_n_d C_i_t_y, T_h_e V_i_l_l_a_g_e_i_n
t_h_e T_r_e_e_t_o_p_s,
and others.

The Tribble in the Microwave: Fannish Urban Myths

Friday, 10 PM

Tony Lewis (mod), Chip Hitchcock, Teresa Nielsen Hayden, Mike Resnick

The panel started by defining urban myths (a.k.a. urban legends) and mentioning Jan Harold Brunvand's books along these lines (T_h_e V_a_n_i_s_h_i_n_g H_i_t_c_h_h_i_k_e_r and others). In response to a question as to why

Brunvand was working in Utah, someone said it's because Mormons lead boring lives and need urban legends to liven them up. Nielsen Hayden responded, "Mormons do not lead boring lives, but they're in love with faith-promoting stories." Having defined urban myths as stories passed around as true which aren't, the panelists then proceeded to ignore this definition and tell true (but boring) stories about filling other fans' rooms with helium balloons and such. Admittedly, the story of Rick Katze and another large fan load-testing the runway at Conspiracy by skipping down it did at least provide a humorous image to the audience, but yet another telling of how Harlan Ellison collected money for a damaged screen and then wanted to give the excess to Clarion did nothing for me. (This, by the way, was the origin of the Worldcon Emergency Fund, but eventually someone decided that having Worldcons actually buy insurance was probably a better idea.)

Resnick claimed he got Bob Tucker to give him a cover quote for a novel (something Tucker never does) by refusing to give Tucker directions to the bathroom in his (Resnick's) house unless Tucker provided the quote. This probably really is an urban legend, or at least an exaggeration--I can't imagine that a house could be so confused that someone couldn't find a bathroom on their own.

Someone told the story of when Alexei Panshin came to a NESFA meeting and was asked to help collate (that being a traditional thing to do at a NESFA meeting). He supposedly got all huffy and said he didn't collate fanzines--he was a professional author! Just then Isaac Asimov stuck his head out of the door into the collating room and said, "I'm running out of page four." Well, it m_i_g_h_t be true.

And several people talked about one hotel which had elevator problems that they refused to fix. So one person, who was in an upper-story room, called the fire department to say they were trapped in their room (since none of the working elevators went to his floor). Another called the town's safety inspector, who closed the hotel down for a few days. A third wrote the hotel's insurance carrier, and caused the hotel yet more grief.

They even drifted into the topic of recursive science fiction

(science fiction about science fiction authors and conventions). The

fact that Lewis just published A n A n n o t a t e d

B i b l i o g r a p h y o f R e c u r s i v e

S c i e n c e F i c t i o n may have had something to do with this.

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At the end of the panel, everyone sang a surprise "Happy Birthday" to Lewis, and Resnick read an appreciation of him (of which Resnick said, "If this lacks a certain felicity of expression it's because I didn't write it").

We then went to the Con Suite--a large room with soda and munchies. It seemed very empty, but that's probably better than having it overcrowded. (This was the room in the Tara that was used as a dealers' room the last two years. Come to think of it, maybe they could offer overflow dealer space here for dealers willing to bring their stuff in when they want to sell it and pack it up and removed it when they aren't there.) I picked up a T-shirt from last year's Boskone (always on the look-out for bargains, and they discount them heavily after the con is over).

Whither Criticism: The Purpose and Direction of Criticism

Saturday, 11 AM

Peter J. Heck (mod), Samuel R. Delany, Thomas A. Easton,
Evelyn C. Leeper, Gordon Van Gelder

Well, since fools rush in where angels fear to tread and all that, I was perfectly willing to answer the opening question: "What is the difference between reviews and criticism?" I said that criticism assumes the reader has read the book; reviews assume s/he hasn't. Now, I admitted even then that this was a very rough cut at an answer, and other people did offer variations or differing opinions. Delany quoted D. H. Lawrence: "The purpose of critics is to save authors from themselves." (I can't recall if this was in the specific context of criticism versus reviews, or just in general.)

We also discussed negative reviews, pro and con. I was in a unique position on the panel in that I could review what I chose--the rest had books assigned to them. So while they sometimes h a d to write a negative review, I had the option of just writing no review. I did say, however, that in my fields of (semi-)expertise (Sherlock Holmes and alternate

histories) I did feel some obligation to review everything I ran across, if only to warn other aficionados against wasting their money.

The constraints we worked under also influenced our reviewing in other ways. Easton and Van Gelder review for monthly magazines (A n a l o g and N e w Y o r k R e v i e w o f S c i e n c e F i c t i o n respectively), meaning a several-month lead time between when they write the review and when it appears. Delaney talked about reviewing for the N e w Y o r k T i m e s (Sunday edition) and how it was more likely to affect sales because of its timeliness. I said that my reviews took not months or even days to appear, but hours. However, my lead time was greater--they all get review copies before publication, while in most cases I can't review a book until it's been published and I buy it.

In response to discussion about whether people read reviews for books they've already read (separate from the review versus criticism

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issue), Mark Leeper mentioned from the audience that he likes to put "information bombs" in his reviews, little facts that take on more meaning after the reader has read the book. For example, he included some information about the parallels between T h e G o d f a t h e r P a r t I I I and C a v a l l e r i a R u s t i c a n a (which was used in T h e G o d f a t h e r P a r t I I I) which was more meaningful to people who had seen the film and would suddenly become clear to others when they did see it.

Small press publishers in the audience talked about the problems they have. With such small press runs they can't afford to send out a lot of review copies, but then this means they won't get reviewed. Delaney suggested sending a copy to the N e w Y o r k T i m e s as he says their method for selecting the books to be reviewed is the most likely to result in a small press item being chosen.

Alternate Histories: The Way We Weren't

Saturday, 1 PM

Mark Olson (mod), Elizabeth Carey, Mark Keller, Evelyn C. Leeper

This is starting to become one of the obligatory panels at science

fiction conventions. (Well, at least they didn't have a Sherlock Holmes panel as well!) Keller talked about getting into alternate histories through his study of regular history--historians apparently write these things called "counter-factual speculations" for historical journals.

They're alternate histories in which the historians change one variable and try to predict the outcome. For example, what if Julius Caesar had survived the assassination attempt? This sounds very familiar, right?

The book Patricia Crone and M. Cook's H_a_g_a_r_i_s_m: T_h_e M_a_k_i_n_g_o_f_t_h_e I_s_l_a_m_i_c_W_o_r_l_d was mentioned, which I gather at least covers some possibilities for an alternate history of religion.

Keller (who by the way will be publishing an annotated bibliography of alternate histories late this year or early next) mentioned some recent "mainstream" alternate histories, including Oscar Lewis's T_h_e

L_a_s_t_Y_e_a_r_s and George Bernau's P_r_o_m_i_s_e_s_t_o_K_e_e_p and C_a_n_d_l_e_i_n_t_h_e_W_i_n_d.

One variation we touched upon, if only to distinguish it from "true" alternate history, was that of the "secret history," in which history turns out to be not what we had thought. An example might be that Hitler was really assassinated in 1933, and a substitute was put in his place, or that Elizabeth I was really a man, or whatever. The various Illuminati conspiracy novels would also fall into this category.

Another distinction we made was the "change-war" story versus the straight alternate history. While I (and the other panelists, as far as I could tell) accept both as alternate histories, there are some who don't, or at least want the distinction retained. "Change-war" stories assume time travel, and someone going back and changing the past. (I don't think they necessarily require two sides competing about how the past should be, even though the term "change-war" would seem to imply that.) Non-"change-war" stories just assume a different timeline arose

naturally.

Someone asked about the competing theories that "The man makes history" and "History makes the man." Though much alternate history assumes the former, some have been written with the latter as a guiding principle. This led us into a discussion of chaos theory and Mark

Leeper's contention that chaos theory says that even if Lincoln just sneezed in a different direction, things now would be v_e_r_y different.

Olson said that chaos theory had caused a lot of ripples (so to speak) in science fiction and pointed out that Isaac Asimov's P_r_e_l_u_d_e_t_o F_o_u_n_d_a_t_i_o_n attempted to reconcile psycho-history with chaos theory (not entirely successfully, to his mind).

The usual question of "Which are the best alternate histories?" arose. Answers included Ken Grimwood's R_e_p_l_a_y, John Brunner's T_i_m_e_s_W_i_t_h_o_u_t_N_u_m_b_e_r, James Hogan's T_h_r_i_c_e_U_p_o_n_a_T_i_m_e, and Keith Roberts's P_a_v_a_n_e. If I were restricting my nominations to book-length works, I would also add Len Deighton's S_S_G_B; Harry Harrison's A_T_r_a_n_s_a_t_l_a_n_t_i_c_T_u_n_n_e_l,H_u_r_r_a_h!; Ward Moore's B_r_i_n_g_t_h_e_J_u_b_i_l_e_e; Robert Sobel's F_o_r_W_a_n_t_o_f_a_N_a_i_l; and Poul Anderson's "Time Patrol" stories. There are also a few anthologies edited by Gregory Benford worth investigating: H_i_t_l_e_r_V_i_c_t_o_r_i_o_u_s,W_h_a_t_M_i_g_h_t_H_a_v_e_B_e_e_n_1:A_l_t_e_r_n_a_t_e_E_m_p_i_r_e_s, and W_h_a_t_M_i_g_h_t_H_a_v_e_B_e_e_n_2:A_l_t_e_r_n_a_t_e_H_e_r_o_e_s. (He has another couple of volumes scheduled for the next year as well.) Philip Mackie wrote an excellent alternate history teleplay, "An Englishman's Castle," which occasionally shows up on PBS. In the short form, the top contender seemed to be H. Beam Piper's "And He Walked Around the Horses," though any attempt to list the best stories would result in a very long list indeed. The anthologies mentioned above at least give a good start.

Other books mentioned as being of interest were Graham Holderness's S_h_a_k_e_s_p_e_a_r_e's_H_i_s_t_o_r_y, a "counter-factual speculation" written as if everything Shakespeare wrote in his histories (and other plays?) was fact. (Or maybe it was an expose of how it wasn't--I wish my notes were better!) In this regard, Poul Anderson's A_M_i_d_s_u_m_m_e_r_T_e_m_p_e_s_t was recommended as well. History books of use to alternate historians include Edward N. Luttwak's T_h_e_G_r_a_n_d_S_t_r_a_t_e_g_y_o_f_t_h_e_R_o_m_a_n_E_m_p_i_r_e:F_r_o_m_t_h_e_F_i_r_s_t_C_e_n_t_u_r_y_A.D._t_o_t_h_e_T_h_i_r_d; William H. McNeill's P_u_r_s_u_i_t_o_f_P_o_w_e_r,V_e_n_i_c_e:T_h_e_H_i_n_g_e_o_f_E_u_r_o_p_e, and P_l_a_g_u_e_s_a_n_d_P_e_o_p_l_e_s (and for that matter, anything else he wrote); and James Burke's C_o_n_n_e_c_t_i_o_n_s. In regard to the last mentioned, Keller said that though it provided a lot of ideas on how history might have been different, many were not viscerally exciting. Writing about how a slight change in farming technology made a difference in the settlement of Europe is not likely to arouse great interest, Leo Frankowski's "Cross-Time Engineer" series notwithstanding.

Someone said that they thought they had a great idea for an alternate history--what if the Vikings settled America? (Or rather, what if they settled it somewhat more successfully than they did?) But

then he discovered this had been done already by John Maddox Roberts in K _ i _ n _ g _ o _ f _ t _ h _ e _ W _ o _ o _ d. This led me to ask Keller what the most common change

points were. The most common (in English-language science fiction, anyway) was "What if Germany (Japan) had won World War II?" (over a hundred that he found). The next most popular was "What if the South had won the Civil War?" (about eighty)--this shows the American influence for sure, as I doubt many of these were written by Britons or Australians. Third was "What if the Spanish Armada hadn't been defeated?" The most popular in French was "What if Napoleon had not been defeated?" which Keller said usually resulted in a better world than we have, while most American alternate histories show things as being worse. When someone in the audience asked why, Olson replied, "We look at this as the best of all possible worlds, but the French know it isn't, because most people speak English."

(Keller frequently referred to alternate histories as "uchronias," a good Greek term that maybe 10% of the audience understood.)

The North Shall Rise Again: Alternate Civil Wars
Saturday, 2 PM

John Barnes (mod), Mark Keller, Michael F. Flynn

Through the sort of scheduling cock-up that one does n _ o _ t expect to see at Boskone, this alternate history was scheduled back-to-back with the last one--in the other hotel! (Pity Mark Keller if no one else--he h _ a _ d to be on time.) Be that as it may, this was equally well-attended--I wonder what the overlap was? Keller started by mentioning that this was the second-most popular topic in English-language alternate histories, so it was reasonable to have such a panel. (And of course, all the recent interest in the subject stirred by the PBS series may have had some influence on the choice of the topic.) However, since historical opinion is that the only question about the outcome of the Civil War (or the War Between the States, if you prefer) is how long it would take for the North to win, and why it took as long as it did, the panel had to explain how a writer could postulate the South winning. (Only even worse Northern generals--and the panelists agreed this was hard to conceive of--would have made the war last longer, and even then the North couldn't help but win by 1866 or 1867.) The only way the

panelists could see to have the South win was by postulating some sort of massive outside intervention, though they had difficulty finding any that seemed likely given the actual world situation. Britain was unlikely to come in on the side of the South--they wanted a strong United States to promote the Monroe Doctrine and keep the other European powers from expanding their empires into the Western Hemisphere. France, in fact, did set up a protectorate in Mexico while the war was going on. After the war, we turned our attention to that area and France quickly withdrew. Still, the panelists thought this might be a fruitful area to work in for a believable alternate history.

As to why the South thought the British would support them, Keller said that the South thought Europe needed their cotton to keep their

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mills going. But France and England had both just discovered new sources: Egypt and India. Several possibilities for alternate histories were thrown out from the audience in response to this. What if the South and spread the boll weevil to Egypt and India to destroy these sources? What if the South had shipped all their cotton to warehouses in England before the blockade so that they could sell it and get hard cash? What if the South had tried harder to hold on to New Orleans and the large banks that were there?

A discussion of battle techniques followed. There was not much alternate history content here. There was some discussion of how the Virginia was built from the Merrimac because that was the fastest way to build an iron-clad. This led to speculation about the outcome if the North had worked harder on capturing Virginia, both because that was the commercial and governmental center of the South and because of the Tredigger Iron Works, which were the South's only iron works. (One interesting fact: the South had experimented with "cotton-clad" ships, whose sides were covered with bales of cotton. While they did stop the bullets and shells from piercing the hull, the heat of the projectiles meant that after a while your ship would start to smolder!)

Much abuse was heaped upon General George McClellan (probably deserved). Speculation about how things would have been different were he out of the picture much earlier led only to a much faster Northern victory.

Other factors affecting the outcome were the constant flow of immigrants into the North, where if they joined the Army for two years they got "forty acres and a mule," as well as \$75 and citizenship. To starving Irish peasants, this was a pretty good deal. Even if they didn't join the Army, there were jobs. In the South, there were no jobs, and not much of a future if you joined the Army either. One person mentioned the theory that the Civil War was the last great battle between the Anglo-Saxons (North) and the Celts (South). This was laughed at by the panelists, especially in light of the large influx of Irish to the North during the war. Barnes later noted that our view of the South as someplace full of the Celtic heritage (a `la G_o_n_e_w_i_t_h_t_h_e _ W_i_n_d) was almost totally inaccurate, and that our impressions all came from the movie version. "From _ T_h_e _ B_i_r_t_h _ o_f _ a _ N_a_t_i_o_n to _ G_o_n_e_w_i_t_h_t_h_e _ W_i_n_d is when the Old South was established," he explained. (For those not up on their history, that's 1915 to 1939.) And the reason all those Southern mansions look alike was that they were all built within a twenty-year or so period. There was no long tradition of huge plantations in the South; most of the farms were small and unimposing.

Another interesting fact brought out was who was really on which side. That is, the mountainous regions of the South in Tennessee and Arkansas, which were not cotton-growing areas, often supported the North and provided most of the backing for the Peace and Constitution Party. The mountainous areas of Virginia supported the North so much, in fact, that they broke away from Virginia and formed West Virginia, and Texas

almost seceded from the South as well. Well, logic says if the Southern states could secede from the Union, why couldn't some of those states then secede from the Confederacy?

Trying (one suspects desperately) to get the panel back on track, Keller said there were really three directions a Civil War alternate history could take: no war at all, a Southern victory, or a shorter war leading to a Northern victory. (The latter would result in less destruction and disgrace of the South--no Sherman's March, for example.)

The most highly recommended alternate history in this area was Ward

Moore's _ B_r_i_n_g_t_h_e _ J_u_b_i_l_e_e. The worst were Terry Bisson's _ F_i_r_e_o_n_t_h_e _ M_o_u_n_t_a_i_n (an opinion from an audience member), and Mark Keller's

personal choice for worst alternate history ever (not just Civil War alternate history): John Jakes's BlackinTime, which had, among other things, blacks driving black-and-white spotted cars with large curved horns in front which were called "Masai 6" cars, all as a result of a black time traveler trying to improve the position of blacks. Other lesser-known alternate histories of varying quality included James Thurber's "If Grant Had Been Drinking at Appomattox," Sir Winston Churchill's (yes, that Winston Churchill) "If Lee Had Not Won at Gettysburg," and Howard Waldrop and Stephen Utley's "Custer's Last Jump." In regard to the latter, Keller said it had zeppelins and after all, "If it's an alternate world it has to have zeppelins--that's rule one." Now there's an idea for an alternate history panel--"Alternate Histories with Zeppelins." This brought mention of "Quit Zoomin' Those Hands Through the Air, Boy" by Jack Finney, but that may have been zeppelin alternate history rather than Civil War alternate history.

One interesting alternate history (title and author not given) had as its focus a document that proved that the South had a legal right to secede, and attempts by competing time travelers to get or destroy this document. The consensus of the historians present was that the South did in fact have this right, but the North had the guns. The victors write the history books. Someone also pointed out that before the Civil War people would say, "The United States are ..." and only afterwards did it become "The United States is" (This was cribbed from the PBS "Civil War" series.)

[end of Part 1]

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