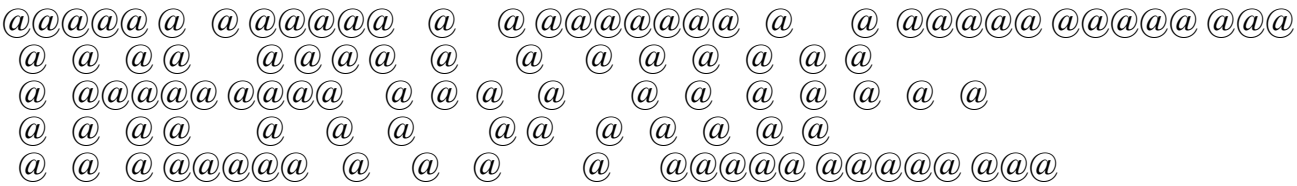

Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
Club Notice - 10/15/93 -- Vol. 12, No. 16

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are in Holmdel 4N-509
Wednesdays at noon.

_D_A_T_E	_T_O_P_I_C
10/27	THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS by Robert A. Heinlein (Classic SF)
11/17	BRIAR ROSE by Jane Yolen (Nebula Nominee)
12/08	STAND ON ZANZIBAR by John Brunner (Classic SF)
01/05	A MILLION OPEN DOORS by John Barnes (Nebula Nominee)
01/26	Bookswap
02/16	Demo of Electronic Hugo and Nebula Anthology (MT)

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	LZ 3L-312	908-576-3346 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. I was talking about the budget. One of the things that was cut was a $20 billion plan to create half a million jobs. Think about how many jobs _h_a_l_f _a _m_i_l_l_i_o_n is! And it would cost us only about twenty stealth bombers. Sounds pretty good, doesn't it? _H_a_l_f _a _m_i_l_l_i_o_n _j_o_b_s! Sounds like a good deal until you do the division. It costs $40,000 for each job that will be created. What do you figure these jobs pay? Give me $40,000 and I will hire someone to

come to my house and throw cards into a hat for a year and pay him $30,000. Not a bad salary for card-tossing. I mean, what's the big trick of creating a job if you have $40,000 to do it with? That's your salary right there.

But the deficit is different. Everybody agrees that cutting the deficit is necessary and important. Everybody agrees that forty-nine of the states are wasting tax dollars on frivolous uses such as the Institute for Historical Ninja Turtles Studies. Of course, his or her own state--whichever one that might be--is building the rocket engines that will push the Earth out of the path of the comet next year (Ooops. That hasn't been announced yet. That's off the record) if we can just get the funding away from the other forty-nine states, each of whom have their own Ninja Turtles Studies project. Every Congresscritter seems convinced his or her state is the only state capable of spending money wisely. So in the old days everybody spent money on credit. The way they showed fiscal responsibility was to cut funding for science. Now there is less money to go around so the government is cutting where it can, like the super-collider. That is the great thing about democracy: the people can choose to spend more money on Madonna or the Miami Dolphins or MTV than they spend on mathematics. But it's like choosing to eat nothing but potato chips and chocolate cake.

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

A thinker (and what is an artist if not a triple thinker?) should have neither religion nor fatherland nor even any social convictions.

-- Gustave Flaubert

ConFrancisco 1993
Con report by Evelyn C. Leeper

(Part 2 of 5)

Panel: AAAAhhhhooooyyyy,,,, HHHHaaaavvvveeee YYYYoooouuuu SSSSeeeeeeeennnn tttthhhheeee GGGGrrrreeeeaaaatttt WWWWhhhhiiiittttteeee AAAArrrrcccchhhheeeettttyyyypppeeee????
Friday, 12 noon
Mary J. Caraker, Howard Frank, Katharine Kerr (m),
Mike Resnick, Carol Severance

"What are they? Uses and abuses? Are there 'styles' in archetypes over the years?": The panel described archetypes as "ripping off mythological themes," as well as Christ figures and primitive legends. Most science fiction and fantasy is dominated by white European cultures and archetypes, though Severance uses Pacific Islanders and their archetypes. (Severance did note that she realizes that "Pacific Islanders" is a very broad term, encompassing many different cultures.) Severance felt that using different cultures made the fiction more interesting, because "every

culture carries the rhythm of the physical setting that it's in." She mentioned in passing the large number of words for snow in Inuit languages, but also said that every Pacific Island language had a word meaning "death by falling cocoanut." Caraker is using the Kalevala (Finnish)--European, but not really over-used.

The panelists tried to distinguish between stereotype and archetype by saying the an archetype is a function within a pattern of story (e.g., quest stories have a hero). As Maia Cowan noted, archetypes don't have to be people; they can be the quest itself, the journey, the generational ship, the wild place, or the clean village. (Someone noted that Earth _i_s a generational ship, and someone else observed only poor villages were clean, because only rich villages would have garbage.) Olaf Stapledon was an author with a lot of archetypes and no characters whatsoever.

One danger in talking about archetypes is that people will find things in writing that was never (consciously) intended by the author.

H. Rider Haggard was an author cited whose work was almost entirely archetypal. But Frank noted that Haggard's best-known work was not his best, and that Haggard had the utmost respect for black culture in Africa, contrary to many people's impressions. Haggard also has a Victorian view of women but not, Frank claimed, a negative one. (Frank recommended _N_a_d_a _t_h_e _L_i_l_y and _E_r_i_c _B_r_i_g_h_t_e_y_e_s as Haggard's best. _S_h_e was written in six weeks on a bet.)

Doyle used archetypes: the wise old storyteller in Watson (and others). In fact, the wise old storyteller is a very popular archetype among authors, undoubtedly because they _a_r_e storytellers. Wells has his wise old professor (Cavor). Romulus and Remus are the feral children, which we see later in Rudyard Kipling's Mowgli and Edgar Rice Burroughs's Tarzan. But now these characters are usually given some flaw, usually for comic effect. Even so, science fiction still has noble characters, according to Frank, while most literature doesn't. Kerr felt that women authors often play against

archetype as well as against stereotype in their female characters.

We now have the wise and compassionate alien and the creation that destroys its creator. They may seem new, but they really go back to the angel and the golem. There's also the master navigator, which shows up with Maoris as space-farers. And Heinlein's "competent man" is another archetype.

Someone asked if archetypes are what prevents science fiction from becoming a literary artform, or at least accepted as literature. This seems unlikely; there is much archetypal literature that is accepted as literature.

Anti-heroes are also found in science fiction: Alfred Bester's _D_e_m_o_l_i_s_h_e_d _M_a_n and _T_h_e _S_t_a_r_s _M_y _D_e_s_t_i_n_a_t_i_o_n, Clifford Simak's _C_i_t_y, and David Lindsay's _V_o_y_a_g_e _t_o _A_r_c_t_u_r_u_s.

The prophet as archetype is now often replaced by the author himself or herself, as when someone writes an "if this goes on?" tale. This observation led someone to wonder if a Calvinist (or other believer in predestination) could accept a cautionary tale. On the other hand, what are all the warnings of damnation in the Bible if not cautionary tales?

Apropos of not much else, someone noted that in 1966 a survey of science fiction authors was taken and only Robert Heinlein and Robert Silverberg were making more than $10,000 a year from their science fiction writing. (Isaac Asimov was making more, but mostly from his science writing.) Things have improved; a recent survey shows several authors (unnamed) making more than $50,000 a year from their science fiction writing.

Panel: UUUUssssiiiinnnngggg LLLLiiiitttteeeerrrraaaarrrryyyy TTTTeeeeecccchhhhnnnniiiiqqqquuuueeeessss iiiinnnn SSSSFFFF////FFFF
Friday, 1:00 PM
Nicholas A. DiChario, Jean Mark Gawron, Eileen Gunn (m), Michael Kandel

"Is there room for stream of consciousness, self-referentiality, fractured time schemes and so on in SF?": The short answer seems to be yes, but focus on the task and choose the technique to fit rather than vice versa (according to Kandel, anyway). But it is the story-telling that is important, not the artsy-fartsy stuff.

The panelists agreed that writers pick up techniques by reading other writers and that therefore it is probably inevitable that these techniques will appear in science fiction. And some writers are more naturally stylists than others. The example given was that Mike Resnick is a storyteller and Lucius Shepard is a stylist.

How well do techniques translate from one language to another? This was a question perhaps better suited for the "Language" panel later, but Kandel said that there were some techniques that translated easily and others that were very difficult. (See the "Language" panel later for more on this.)

Regarding stylistic tricks, Kandel said that often one should "take out the goop" to improve things. This is true in the mainstream as well as in science fiction, since the dichotomy between the two implied in this panel's title doesn't really exist. Kandel also warned against "expository lumps," which seem inherent in science fiction, but can be handled well. As an example of an author who could handle these "lumps," Kandel mentioned James Schmitz. Gunn said that you should "cut out the boring, tedious stuff and leave only what interests you."

People asked about specific techniques. Regarding foreshadowing, one panelist said that it has to come from the text, not be applied to it like lipstick. However, a beginning writer may have to do this consciously for a while before it becomes an automatic process.

In answer to my question, DiChario said that he had chosen the diary format for "The Winterberry" as the best way to show the main character's mental state and also to skip large chunks of time. I didn't ask, but it seems obvious that this technique was inspired by Daniel Keyes's _F_l_o_w_e_r_s _f_o_r _A_l_g_e_r_n_o_n.

Panel: GGGGeeeennnnddddeeeerrrr BBBBeeeennnnddddiiiinnnngggg:::: WWWWhhhhaaaatttt""ssss GGGGooooooooddddd

Friday, 2:00 PM

Michael Blumlein, Suzy McKee Charnas, Jeanne Gomoll (m)

"Exploration of gender and roles isn't as popular in science fiction as it used to be. Are the issues too imponderable or have we explored this area thoroughly?": Blumlein started out by reminding us that the major debate about gender roles is still nature versus nurture. One of the best examples using the nurture theory in recent books is Sheri Tepper's _S_i_d_e_s_h_o_w, in which the one of the two (hermaphroditic) halves of a set of joined twins is raised as a boy and one is raised as a girl.

Charnas noted that women can fill the spectrum of behavior, but

that most fiction doesn't provide enough templates for this. However, if one writes about a society composed only of women, one finds that there is no problem in writing about a _c_o_m_p_l_e_t_e society.

One doesn't find parts that women can't fit. (One assumes the same would be true from a men-only society, assuming some form of artificial reproduction. In fact, someone said that Lois McMaster Bujold did this with _E_t_h_a_n _o_f _A_t_h_o_s.)

One function of gender roles is to provide people with an anchor of stability. Most people are uncomfortable in free-floating masses of people (according to Charnas) and so groups form. (This hearkens back to Robinson's comments about tribalism in his Postmodernism lecture.) Charnas gave Nicola Griffith's _A_m_m_o_n_i_t_e as a good example of this group dynamic.

The discussion drifted into "gender dysphoria," or the psychological condition of feeling that your psychological sex doesn't match your physiological sex. (Forgive me if I am expressing this poorly; I do not have an M.D.) Someone said that, while transsexual surgery used to be considered a solution to this, such surgery is becoming less popular, though many people are taking the necessary hormones and living as the "other" sex. One suggested reason for this is that the easier of the two surgeries is male-to-female, but being a female in society today results in a loss of power, and people aren't ready to do that permanently. (Though I would think living as a female would have the same effect.) With this, as with a lot of the discussion, a lot of generalizations were thrown around.

Someone pointed out that even if someone did change their sex later in life (such as happened in Virginia Woolf's _ O_ r_ l_ a_ n_ d_ o), they would still have experienced the first part of their life as their original sex. In the case of Orlando, he had gone through adolescence as a boy, and so did not have the same life experiences as someone who went through adolescence as a girl, even after he changed into a woman. (The panelists felt that the movie left a lot out that the book had.)

Regarding gender roles, someone observed that society makes

rules because the rules _ a_ r_ e_ n'_ t fixed within us--if they were, we wouldn't have to make artificial ones. Someone else cited _ T_ h_ e _ R_ a_ i_ n_ b_ o_ w _ M_ a_ n by M. J. Engh, in which women were _ d_ e_ f_ i_ n_ e_ d as people who could give birth. So a "woman" who had some physiological problem which would prevent her from giving birth would not be considered a woman by that society.

One belief expressed was that there is a lot of emphasis placed on the societal pressures put on girls and woman, and less placed on the corresponding pressures on boys and men. At least one panelist said that we pretend that we can "skip the angry part" of problem-solving, but that is not true; we need to confront the pain.

There was some book-flogging at the beginning of this panel. Blumlein, who has an M. D., has written _ T_ h_ e _ M_ o_ v_ e_ m_ e_ n_ t _ o_ f _ M_ o_ u_ n_ t_ a_ i_ n_ s

and _ T_ h_ e _ B_ r_ a_ i_ n_ s _ o_ f _ R_ a_ t_ s, and has a new book (called _ X, _ Y) coming out soon from Dell which will deal with a gay man who wakes up one day as a woman.

[Note: When discussing this subject, one trips all over the pronouns of the English language. If one is discussing someone who is in transition from one sex to the other (or was one and is now the other), pick either "he" or "she" and stick with it. "He/she" may work in written language as a replacement for "He or she," but in spoken language "he-she" is considered as offensive as any number of racial or ethnic epithets which I will not list here. This is undoubtedly because this grammatical construction has been picked up by the religious right and used by them in an extremely negative and condescending fashion. So now you know.]

Panel: C C C Co o o om m m mp p p pu u u ut t t te e e er r r rs s s s a a a an n n nd d d dC C C Cl l l la a a as s s ss s s s
Friday, 4:00 PM
Lisa Mason, Tim May, Althea McMurrian,
Jack Nimersheim, Richard Weiss (m)

"In an increasingly technology driven future, will the computer illiterates be the next underclass?": The discussion centered more on whether the current underclass would remain that way because they were denied access to computers than whether the "computer illiterate" of any class would become the new underclass. Interestingly, all the panelists were in the computer field, meaning that there was no "voice of the opposition," or in this case, no input from the people who do _ n_ o_ t use computers.

One feeling about computers and networking that most people seemed to agree with was that on a one-to-one basis it was a great equalizer, but overall it can be a stratifier. One question asked was, if the problem is exacerbated by the fact that upper-class people have more access to computers than lower-class people, does this mean that upper-class parents should stop getting their children the computers and other advantages they can afford?

Some people felt that the problem was not computer literacy or illiteracy, but literacy in general, and that was far more accessible to everyone.

On a more positive note, someone said that even the lower classes have Nintendo, which is a computer, so it is not the case that they are completely cut off from technology.

While the discussion was interesting, I don't think any of the panel (or the audience, most likely) had any definite knowledge on the topic. There was a lot of anecdotal evidence ("I've seen discrimination in computers" "I haven't"), but no real basis for coming to conclusions.

Panel: N N N Ne e e em m m ma a a a
P P P Pr r r ro o o ob b b bl l l le e e em m m ma a a a
Friday, 5:00 PM
Lynn D. Maners (m), Larry Roeder

"The Worldcon is not in the former Yugoslavia this year, but many fans still live there. Who are they, and what's happened to them?": Well, the good news is that as far as Maners knows, none of

the well-known Yugoslav fans have been killed in the war there. Other than that, information is sketchy. The two major science fiction magazines, _ A_ l_ e_ f and _ S_ i_ r_ i_ u_ s, have folded. The clubs still meet--since none ever got any cultural funding anyway (through the Yugoslav equivalent of the National Endowment for the Arts), the break-up didn't disrupt that aspect of their organizations. (Of course, the runaway inflation in many of the republics must be damaging in general.)

Maners thought Slovenia was the only one of the republics to have turned into a democracy; the others are still dictatorships of one form or another. Apropos of this, I am reading Rebecca West's _ B_ l_ a_ c_ k _ L_ a_ m_ b _ a_ n_ d _ G_ r_ e_ y _ F_ a_ l_ c_ o_ n, her description of her travels through Yugoslavia in 1937 (complete with large chunks of history--those "expository lumps" that Kandel warns against in fiction writing, but which are marvelous in non-fiction). In her prologue, she says, "English persons, therefore, of humanitarian and reformist disposition constantly went out to the Balkan peninsula to see who was in fact ill-treating whom, and, being by the very nature of their perfectionist faith unable to accept the horrid hypothesis that everybody was ill-treating everybody else, came back with a pet Balkan people established in their hearts as suffering and innocent, eternally the massacree and never the massacrer. The same sort of person ... often set up on the hearth [their pet people as resembling] Sir Joshua Reynolds's picture of the infant Samuel. But ... to hear Balkan-fanciers talk about each other's Infant Samuel was to think of some painter not at all like Sir Joshua Reynolds, say Hieronymous Bosch." But I digress.

There was some discussion of Yugoslav science fiction, where Maners said that it tended towards the philosophical rather than towards the more hardware-oriented versions. This he attributed to the fact that the country was not a major technological power, and he says this tendency is found in the science fiction of most smaller countries. In addition to being less technological, it is often less optimistic. It's easy for a citizen of a super-power to be optimistic about the future; it's more difficult for someone in a less powerful country. For one thing, they may feel that much of their future is in the hands of the super-power, who may decide to take action against them, or at any rate, ignore their welfare when making decisions.

Maners gave very complete instructions on how fans can donate books to the United States Information Agency libraries abroad

(which is a sort of cultural exchange organization--_ n_ o_ t part of the Diplomatic Corps). Let me know if you want them.

Towards the end Larry Roeder came in and added a darker tone to the proceedings. He said that he expects there to be a lot more war in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, particularly since we have taken away the ability of the Bosnian Muslims to defend themselves. Ethnicity, he says, is _ t_ h_ e issue of the next decade, not just in the Balkans, but everywhere. Or, as D. Keith Mano said, "If Wilsonian self-determination were applied strictly to Yugoslavia there would be no kingdom larger than Greenwich Village. Yugoslavia isn't a nation: it's some form of ethnic and political super-collider." (_ N_ a_ t_ i_ o_ n_ a_ l _ R_ e_ v_ i_ e_ w, June 30, 1989) The current plan to divide up Bosnia-Hercegovina certainly seems headed in that direction. However, Americans are not terribly unpopular (a delightful change). In fact, we are loved in Albania. Roeder claimed that this was because Nixon was related to King Zog, though he didn't say how. [Thanks to Mark for this last paragraph's worth; I had to leave early because I was on a 6 PM panel.]

(This panel was very sparsely attended--about thirteen people. Whether this means fans are apathetic, or just not interested in the specific case of _ f_ a_ n_ d_ o_ m in the Balkans, I don't know.)

Panel: T T T Tu u u ur r r rn n n ni i i in n n ng g g g
t t t th h h he e e eW W W Wh h h he e e ee e e el l l ls s s so o o of f f f
I I I If f f f

Friday, 6:00 PM
Charles K. Bradley, John L. Flynn, Evelyn Leeper (m),
Brad Linaweaver, Paul J. McAuley

[Much thanks to Mark for taking copious notes during this panel, as I can't be on a panel and take notes at the same time.]

"A discussion of likely change points for alternate realities, universes and histories": Although usually the panelists for a topic are authors who have written about that topic (and that was true here of Flynn, Linaweaver, and McAuley), Bradley was on the panel for a more unusual reason: he uses alternate history as a way to teach students regular history (though he did admit that sometimes he had to make sure they weren't getting confused about what was real and what was imaginary!).

I started by asking the panelists to pick one change point they would like to see dealt with, with the caveat that it _ n_ o_ t be European or North American, and especially not the American Civil War or World War II. McAuley thought that something involving Chinese expansionism might be good, although the feeling was that

the Chinese philosophy did not lend itself to exploration; the Chinese had more of a feeling that other people should come to them. I suggested that if this came out of Confucianism, then a timeline without Confucius might have some interesting results. (Someone later suggested that the Chinese stopped exploring because they saw

no monetary benefit from continuing.) Flynn said the one alternate history story he had written ("Paradox Lost") assumed that the Library at Alexandria hadn't been burnt and that the Egyptians conquered the world. I pointed out that what Mark was always reminding people was that the amount of time since the fall of the Egyptian empire was shorter than the time the empire existed (or as Mark says, "We are in the umbra of the Egyptian empire"). Linaweaver said he had just written "The Bison Riders" in which the Aztecs are not defeated by the Spanish, but instead become high-tech and expand into North America. (Strictly speaking, this is still a North American change point, but not a Eurocentric one.)

Bradley thought that something interesting could be done with General William Walker, who tried to seize Baja California and Sonora in 1853. He failed, but set himself up as president of Nicaragua in 1856, but was expelled in 1857. In 1860, he invaded in Honduras, where his luck ran out: he was captured, court-martialed, and shot. Even today, he is hated by many factions in Central America. Another suggestion Bradley had was what if we had supported Ho Chi Minh, though again that is too close to an over-used change-point. My personal favorite (having recently read about prehistoric animal migrations) is what if the Bering land bridge had not existed? Not only would the Americas have been unpopulated when the Europeans (or Asians, or Africans) arrived, but the animal life of the Americas, and of Europe/Asia/Africa would have been vastly different. For example, as someone noted, horses and camels were New World animals which migrated _ b_ a_ c_ k to the Old World and then died out in the New World. Imagine a Europe/Asia/Africa without horses or camels or donkeys. Other ideas for change-points batted around through the hour included what if Kaiser Wilhelm's father had lived longer, what if the Roanoke Colony had never existed, what if Carthage hadn't been defeated by Rome, what if Peter the Great hadn't turned Russia towards the West instead of remaining Eastern and what if Huey Long had been elected President (Virginia Dabney

had this happen in a 1936 story which also assumed the South won the Civil War, and Barry Malzberg did this last year in "Kingfish"). Bradley noted that there are still people who believe that Roosevelt had Long killed, leading to a brief digression into conspiracy theories and secret histories, with Linaweaver suggesting that maybe Roosevelt also flew the lead plane at Pearl Harbor.

There was some subsidiary discussion about the Aztecs. Political correctness these days blames the Spanish for conquering them, but the fact is that the Spanish had a lot of help from the Aztecs' neighbors, who were tired of being captured for human sacrifices. Linaweaver claims the Aztecs were vicious fascists. (Note that he speaks from a libertarian perspective, though I suspect he's right in any case.)

I asked the panelists' views on the "tide of history" versus "great man" theories, noting that the former was in some sense the

Marxist view and the latter the capitalist view, leading the former to be somewhat in disrepute these days. I placed myself somewhat in the middle: some things happen because of a unique individual, but there is also truth to Robert Heinlein's "When it's time to railroad, you railroad." McAuley wondered if Marxism itself would have gotten off the ground without Marx to write _ D_ a_ s _ K_ a_ p_ i_ t_ a_ l. Since it was based on technological acceleration, would Marxism have arisen if we never got beyond water power? Flynn agreed that the "great man" theory seems the most likely to be true. Linaweaver agreed with me that a mix is the most reasonable guess. He suggested that without Hitler, there probably would have been a World War II, but it probably would have been very different, and the Holocaust would almost definitely have been greatly reduced. He noted that Communism had been based on the work of many people, but National Socialism was entirely Hitler's concept. Other "great men" he listed were Einstein and Tesla. When I suggested that if Einstein hadn't discovered relativity, someone else would have, Fred Adams from the audience said that was true--that relativity was in the air. I gave the further example of Newton and Leibnitz discovering calculus independently and almost simultaneously. (Christopher Ambler said this sort of simultaneity happens all the time.) Bradley was also middle-of-the-road, giving one example of

the "great man" theory the idea that without a Lincoln, the United States would not have survived intact.

Someone commented that the rise of chaos theory has led to "fast" alternate histories, in which change occurs much more rapidly than it did before. It used to be that even after fifty years, things looked much the same as in our timeline, but now things become unrecognizable in a short time. This, of course, makes it more difficult for the reader to connect with the story.

At Flynn's suggestion, I asked the panelists why they thought there was such a fascination, especially now, with alternate histories. Flynn suggested it was wish fulfillment. (Bradley noted that alternate histories strike a basic cord in the human psyche; he is descended from Aaron Burr and might have been king.) Ambler disagreed, saying that we may be interested in some of these alternate histories, but we don't necessarily wish for them. Regarding this, I noted that there are two categories of alternate history: the pessimistic (things could have been better) and the optimistic (things could have been worse). The French seem to like alternate histories almost as much as the English-speaking world, yet their alternate histories tend to be more pessimistic (according to Mark Keller). In particular, they focus on how much better things would be if everyone spoke French. Linaweaver thought that the British, on the other hand, portrayed more dystopias than we did, partly because we are still an empire.

Someone said that most alternate histories focused on people; what about some that focused on diseases, natural disasters, and

other events? I noted there have been several based on variations to the spread of the Black Plague (especially the stories in Robert Silverberg's "Gate of Time" anthologies), but other ideas included what if Hurricane Andrew hadn't hit (too soon to show radical change, in my opinion), what if the storm hadn't delayed the Spanish Armada (done by Joseph Edgar Chamberlin as an academic study in 1908), and what if space aliens had invaded us? (For many of these and other ideas, Linaweaver said that work was being done on them, and that Harry Turtledove would be writing them all.) I noted that regarding plagues, 90% of the deaths in the New World after the

Spanish arrived were from disease, not warfare.

We cautioned was that changes had to be somewhat reasonable, a constraint that many authors don't seem to recognize. Many people look at what might have happened if the South had won the Civil War or Germany won World War II, but close examination shows usually there is no way for their scenario to have happened. Prospective authors should watch James Burke's television series _ C_ o_ n_ n_ e_ c_ t_ i_ o_ n_ s to get an idea of causality in history.

I also observed that in alternate histories changing the past changes the future, and maybe this was popular because we want to believe that changing the present changes the future as well. We want control over our destinies, and alternate histories (in general) say that there is _ n_ o_ t pre-destination, but rather free will. (This may have arisen out of Kim Stanley Robinson's comments in his lecture on Postmodernism, when he noted, "The future is going to be different depending on what we do.") In traditional Judaism it is a sin to wish for something that is not possible, e.g., to want to change history. Yet alternate histories give us a way (vicariously) to do this. I also thought that part of my interest was based in my Jewishness--what if the Holocaust could have been prevented?

We never actually figured out why alternate histories were science fiction, although Linaweaver said they were part of the "speculative fiction" aspect of "SF." In history and economics they've been around for a while, as "counter-factuals." In any case, the panelists (especially the authors) said they hoped people kept reading them. Linaweaver also added that he enjoyed alternate histories because he still believed in human genius, and I suggested that the lesson to be learned from them is that one person can make a difference.

At the end, many people requested copies of the Robert Schmunk's alternate history list, an invaluable reference. Linaweaver and Thomas Cron are working on a bibliography in book form, but it's not out yet.

(I would like to note here that John Flynn came _ i_ n_ c_ r_ e_ d_ i_ b_ l_ y prepared for this panel--certainly more than I was. For example, he

mentioned that in his reading up, he found that someone referred to change-points as the "Jon Bar Hinge," after the character in Williamson's _ L_ e_ g_ i_ o_ n _ o_ f _ T_ i_ m_ e. I would recommend him as a totally reliable panelist for other conventions.)

Panel: T T T Th h h he e e e1 1 1 10 0 0 00 0 0 0
M M M MP P P PG G G GE E E En n n ng g g gi i i in n n ne e e e: : : :
L L L Le e e eg g g ge e e en n n nd d d ds s s sT T T Th h h ha a a at t t t
W W W Wi i i il l l ll l l lN N N No o o ot t t tD D D Di i i ie e e e
Saturday, 10:00 AM
Gregory Benford (m), Rick Cook, Steve Howe, Daniel L. Marcus

"'Suppressed technology.' How do stories get started about cars that run on water, carburetors that allow 90 miles per gallon, and anti-cancer drugs made from common household chemicals?": Well, I had expected a panel talking about technological "urban legends" but instead got one talking about how some of these "wildcat" ideas are real, but not marketable. For example, there are cars that can get eighty miles per gallon of gasoline, but they are undrivable under street conditions: they have no acceleration and constantly backfire. The Wankel (rotary) engine was another idea that failed on its own merits (rather than being suppressed); its fuel consumption was high (about fourteen miles per gallon) and it generated a lot of pollution because the seals were never perfected. (So just what was its advantage supposed to be? I can't even remember.)

And then there was the nuclear-powered airplane. Oh, it would have worked, but sufficient shielding around the fuel would have made it too heavy, so it would only work if you had a crew that didn't mind getting fried by the radiation, _ a_ n_ d it would also irradiate all the land it flew over. But the designers had thought of what to do with it when they were done--they would land it in Antarctica and use that as a nuclear-waste dump. (Luckily, this idea never got off the ground--so to speak.)

And remember SDI? This was described by one of the panelists as a "Fast Eddie" Teller idea, and eventually people concluded that it also had more flaws than virtues.

Other ideas probably were more workable, but not wise. Small nuclear bombs, weighing less than a hundred pounds complete, could be used by guerilla forces in Europe after it was overrun by the Soviets. Well, that was the original idea, but someone apparently realized that given the state of the world, having bombs this small that people could smuggle around was a _ r_ e_ a_ l_ l_ y bad idea.

On the other hand, the L5 solar power satellite sounded crazy initially, but turned out to be a good idea.

But why do we believe all the fantastic stories of great inventions and discoveries, even when they are bogus? (Cold fusion

comes to mind, naturally, although it was pointed out that the whole cold fusion thing did teach us a lot about sub-quantum states.)

Well, for one thing, we _ w_ a_ n_ t to believe them. Someone (Thomas Hardy, I think) wrote a poem about how there was a legend that on Christmas Eve, animals could talk, and said at the end that he didn't believe it, but that if someone say it were happening in the barn, he would go, "wishing it might be so." Certainly there must be some explanation of why people believe what they read in the _ W_ e_ e_ k_ l_ y _ W_ o_ r_ l_ d _ N_ e_ w_ s.

Howe said that one problem is that science nowadays is all done as "big science." His analogy is that it's as if the government of the 19th Century deciding to explore the West with an army that marches together as a unit instead of with lots of small exploration and settlement parties. So the "small science" is left with more than its share of cranks. Benford said that his school (University of California at Irvine), the crank calls are doled out to the various professors. Most fall into two categories: 1) "What was that thing I saw in the sky last night?" and 2) "I have a new energy source that will save the world." Howe asked whether Benford wouldn't be sorry if he rejected someone who turned out to be a genius. "Would I be sorry? Yes. But what are the odds?"

One panelist noted that he is more bothered by stories of suppressed cancer cures than stories of suppressed energy sources, because the latter are usually just humorous, but the former touch people personally in matters of life and death. Someone asked about Linus Pauling's theories about anti-oxidants, and the response was that since he was still walking five miles a day at age 92, they shouldn't be written off too quickly.

One audience member noted that the panelists were referring to crackpots as "he" and asked if they had ever run across any female crackpots, to which Benford responded, "I've dated some." Cook noted, however, that female crackpots seem to be more conspiracy theorists than scientists.

One problem with the whole "suppression" and "conspiracy" theory these days is that suppressing an idea in the United States

doesn't do much about suppressing it globally. Of course, there is suppression here, but it is more from the Food & Drug Administration and liability laws than from any secret coterie. In addition (as was noted earlier) the public suppresses things by not buying them and hence driving them off the market. Most products represent a trade-off: you can get more miles per gallon, but only if you are willing to buy a smaller, lighter, slower car. Other products are monopolized (the example given was forceps, invented in the 14th Century but monopolized for a hundred years by one family).

Along the lines of the suppression theories, I recommend David Mamet's _ W_ a_ t_ e_ r _ E_ n_ g_ i_ n_ e, recently made into a movie for TNT.

(There was a certain irony to the fact that this was opposite the panel on Nikola Tesla, and in fact, there was odd sounds coming over the public address system that may have been coming from the demonstrations associated with the other panel.)

Panel: W W W Wh h h he e e en n n n
F F F Fa a a an n n nd d d do o o om m m ma a a an n n nd d d d
R R R Re e e ea a a al l l lW W W Wo o o or r r rl l l ld d d d
P P P Po o o ol l l li i i it t t ti i i ic c c cs s s s
C C C Co o o ol l l ll l l li i i id d d de e e e
Saturday, 11:00 AM
Abi Frost, Jeanne Gomoll (m), Andi Shechter, Ben Yalow

"What should fandom do about boycotts, strikes, war, and real world politics?": Clearly, fandom does need to take note of them: this year's Eurocon was moved to the Channel Isles from Zagreb. But not only lately is there the possibility that conventions will get involved with real-world politics--this has always been the case. The split in fandom at the first Worldcon (when several people were turned away at the door and went across the street to hold their own convention) was part of a larger dispute between the Left (those turned away) and the Right (those running the convention).

It's convenient to think that fandom is united on social issues, but fandom isn't united on _ a_ n_ y_ t_ h_ i_ n_ g. There are plenty of

left-wing fanzines and right-wing fanzines and other-wing fanzines. The best we can say is that fandom is self-policing and self-censoring: most conventions these days try to avoid taking a stand on one side or the other of any issue. (Iguanacon was a major exception to this, and many fans still resent the "co-opting" of that convention as a political statement. It's true that there are smaller conventions which are specifically feminist or otherwise specifically directed, but these are announced as this way up front.) Fandom is _ n_ o_ t apolitical, perhaps (someone suggested) because fans think about and care about the future.

One need only look at the various awards given out in science fiction to see the breadth of the politics: the Prometheus Award by the Libertarians, the Tiptree Award for examination of gender roles, the Gryphon Award, and so on. There is no consensus on anything.

However, labor disputes are another matter. Given that conventions need to deal with unions in hotels and convention centers, they must keep abreast of current disputes. And someone mentioned that fans sometimes need to be warned not to be arrogant toward unionized employees--sometimes our elitism is showing.

(If fandom were paying attention to the real world, would they be scheduling Worldcons to run right into Rosh Hashonah, as is happening next year?)

(End of Part 2)

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