

In any case, the book for discussion is Harry Harrison's W_e_s_t_o_f
E_d_e_n, which takes as its premise "What if the dinosaurs hadn't died
out, but had evolved into the intelligent species?" (and
presumably all those furry little mammals stayed ignorant). Well,
my guess is that for one thing, doors would have to be much larger.

THE MT VOID

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To find out what other changes might have occurred, come to the
meeting. [-ecl]

2. My parents live in Silicon Valley out in California. Even these
days Silicon Valley is fairly affluent and apparently this led to a
problem not too long ago. My parents' town took in more tax money
than they meant to. They were asking people of the town what they
should do with the extra money. I am sure cutting taxes was not
one of the ideas. Luckily, they did not spend the money on my
parents--at least I hope not. I don't know how long the city
government had its hands on the money, but I suspect the dollars
had already been converted to anti-dollars. Governments tend to do
that sort of thing very quickly.

For the benefit of people who learned their economics in economics
classes, I will explain the concept of an anti-dollar. If you have
a concern that is breaking even and the government helps it out by
funding it with a certain amount of money and it ends up one dollar
in the hole, then the government has spent one anti-dollar.
Generally you cannot figure the conversion rate between government
dollars spent and the actual number of anti-dollars just because
when the government has spent a lot of anti-dollars on you, you are
too busy trying to keep your head above water to figure
instantaneous conversion rates.

Let me give you some examples. Say you have two neighboring
countries. I'll call them New Hampshire and Vermont. Vermont
feels uneasy because, borders working like they do, New Hampshire
is right up cheek and jowl next to it. (Yes, I know the great
American tradition was to push away other countries by pushing our
borders right up into them. We defended our way across a continent
this way. But after each expansion there it was, another country,
possibly hostile and definitely foreign, just inches from our
borders. This paradox is called "manifest destiny.")

So back to Vermont and New Hampshire. Vermont decides that with New Hampshire so close and all, it really has to put some money into defense. So they beef up their armaments. New Hampshire sees the writing on the wall. If it doesn't beef up its defenses there is going to be one very big Vermont and only a tiny little New Hampshire. So New Hampshire buys armaments but doesn't tell Vermont how much. (Why should it?)

Now Vermont is really scared they need stronger and more expensive defenses. If they need a lot more money now, they didn't get funded before, they got anti-funded. And the unit of anti-funding is the anti-dollar.

Okay, I can hear the conservatives out there. They're saying, "Who is this hippy-dippy liberal talking against defense spending?" Well, for the conservatives' benefit, let's talk about welfare.

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New York City was once really prosperous. They said, "Hey, let's make this an ideal city. Let's really take care of the poor. Let's fund some really good welfare." No way, guys. You can only anti-fund welfare. People came from all over the country just to enjoy the great welfare in new York. And they stayed and raised families. Soon companies saw their taxes rising and moved out. Those that were left had to carry more of the burden. I don't think anybody knows how many anti-dollars have been poured into New York City, but by the way it is crumbling, it sure must have been a lot!

Anyway, if the city government again comes around and asks my parents where to spend money, I hope my parents are savvy enough to just tell them to keep it.

3. County College of Morris Performing Arts presents the world premier performances of a new musical D_o_r_i_a_n_G_r_a_y, based on T_h_e_P_i_c_t_u_r_e_o_f_D_o_r_i_a_n_G_r_a_y by Oscar Wilde. Remaining performances are Friday and Saturday, September 15 and 16, 1989 at 8 PM, at the Student Center Auditorium (Route 10 and Center Grove Road, Randolph NJ). Tickets are \$5 at the door.

According to Joe Ziegler, "This show has been performed in workshops at CCM and at Georgian Court College, but this is the first full performance of the show ever, and it has been revised considerably since the workshops. This is a very good show, performed by an excellent cast of local amateur performers. If you're into Broadway musicals, don't miss this one. Note that I am mildly prejudiced, since my wife is in the cast."

Contact Joe Ziegler (lznv!ziegler) for further details. [-ecl]

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The price of seeking to force our beliefs on others
is that someday they might force their beliefs on us.
--Mario Cuomo

THE PACKAGE
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: Fast-paced if not entirely
satisfying political thriller has Gene Hackman on the run
from the Army and the police, trying to avert the
sabotage of a nuclear disarmament treaty. Very

reminiscent of other thrillers, especially S_e_v_e_n_D_a_y_s_i_n_M_a_y, but with a few new wrinkles of its own. Rating: low +2.

T_h_e_P_a_c_k_a_g_e is a neat little political thriller with a complex but still fairly coherent plot. The story is reminiscent of some of the better political thrillers from the early 1960s though most of all, and perhaps too closely, it parallels the plot of S_e_v_e_n_D_a_y_s_i_n_M_a_y. T_h_e_P_a_c_k_a_g_e is, however, not as cerebral a thriller as is S_e_v_e_n_D_a_y_s_i_n_M_a_y, having less discussion of the political reasons for what is going on and substituting instead action and car chases. That choice makes the film more entertaining on one level but less involving on a deeper level. While in S_e_v_e_n_D_a_y_s_i_n_M_a_y we are led to conclude that the real enemy is an age, in T_h_e_P_a_c_k_a_g_e there is little doubt that the real enemy is a group of "bad guys" whose motives are all too quickly glossed over. That is just not as satisfying.

[Minor spoilers follow.]

The story begins at a disarmament summit meeting in East Berlin at which United States and Soviet diplomats agree to disarm and cooperate with each other. However, a dissenting group of high-ranking United States and Soviet military people decide they do not want to cooperate with each other, so they team up to sink the treaty so they can go back to distrusting each other. (Now that I think about it, that does seem a bit ironic.) Into this situation is dropped Johnny Gallagher (played by Gene Hackman), Gallagher is a career military man who becomes a cat's-paw for the conspirators. Also on hand is Tommy Lee Jones as a brawling soldier whom Gallagher must "escort" back to the United States and who clearly is not quite what he seems to be. It is not long before Gallagher is on the run from the army, the police, and the conspirators. He enlists the aid of his ex-wife Eileen Gallagher (played by Johanna Cassidy), also a career army officer. It is extremely refreshing, incidentally, to see an intelligent action character played by a woman over 40.

As political thrillers go, T_h_e_P_a_c_k_a_g_e has a complex plot involving a wide spectrum of characters from the intelligence community to Communists to neo-Nazis. While the ultimate goal of the conspirators is not hard to guess, many of the details of their plot are unexpected enough to keep the viewer off-balance and guessing. I give it a low +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

Noreascon 3 '89
Con report by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Noreascon 3, the 1989 World Science Fiction Convention was held August 31 through September 4 in Boston. The attendance was approximately 7200.

Hotels

The convention was in two hotels and the Hynes Convention Center. The Dealers' Room, the Con Suite (more on that later), and most programming items (including the Hugo Award Ceremony and the Masquerade) were in the Hynes; the Art Show and the film program was in the Sheraton. Louis Wu's 200th Birthday Party was in the Hilton, across the street from the Sheraton.

Registration

Registration opened on time, had no lines, and ran very smoothly. The souvenir sales table was in the registration area rather than the Dealers' Room, which meant people could get the T-shirts immediately, though no con since LACon has had a real sell-out problem on T-shirts. The propeller beanies sold out in less than an hour, though.

There is no longer a pocket program. Instead there was a 64-page program book. This is not to be confused with what is usually called the program book, namely the convention souvenir book. This is turn is different from the convention book, in this case a Norton bibliography for sale in the Dealers' Room. Got that? The program book was indexed by program participant, by track, and chronologically. It had all the hotel maps, and was basically the only item you needed to carry with you. There were daily updates of the schedule (one or two sheets) which listed the e_n_t_i_r_e day's program and flagged the changes, so you could even forgo the program book if you knew your way around.

We got registered and picked up the usual freebies (N_e_w_D_e_s_t_i_n_i_e_s and some bookmarks). This was a little odd--there were freebies in both the registration area and in the message area of the Con Suite. Books I can understand not leaving lying around unwatched, but the flyers could have been consolidated. We also picked up our program materials, including a sticker for the back of our badges listing our program items with time and place--very handy! The badges were the usual Boston "readable-from-across-the-room" type which almost everyone seems to prefer. You also had a choice of pins or clips for the badges--MCFI thinks of everything!

Because we didn't arrive until about 1 PM, we missed the opening ceremonies, but other than that, programming started slow and built up gradually--a wise decision since the attendance does the same.

Dealers' Room

The Dealers' Room (a.k.a., the Hucksters' Room) was smaller than I expected, certainly smaller than some previous Worldcons. (It was probably comparable to Nolacon 2--it will be hard to beat the one at Conspiracy though.) As usual, books probably represented less than half of the room and there were used book dealers as well as antiquarian-type book dealers (and of course, new book dealers). I had a very short list of books I was looking for, but still managed to find a half dozen books I was looking for, as well as William Contento's I_n_d_e_x_t_o_S_c_i_e_n_c_e_F_i_c_t_i_o_n_A_n_t_h_o_l_o_g_i_e_s_1_9_7_7-1_9_8_3, our big splurge (but worth it!). Kate finally managed to find S_i_x_S_c_i_e_n_c_e_F_i_c_t_i_o_n_P_l_a_y_s edited by Roger Elwood, but it cost her a bundle.

My major complaint about the dealers is that so many of them don't alphabetize their books. My want list is such that I don't feel it is worth my time to browse through hundreds of randomly-ordered books, though I will go through the entire alphabet of the same number of sorted books. The two best dealers (largest stock, best organized) were Dick Spelman for new books and Southworth Books for used books. (Shameless plug for them here--I have no financial interest in either of them, but think they do a lot to raise the quality of any Dealers' Room they're in.)

Art Show

I got to look at the Art Show only once (Sunday morning). It was well-lit and moderately well-arranged, though the three-dimensional pieces were somewhat cramped (probably the artists' decisions not to buy extra table space more than anything the con could control. We bought a couple of prints in the Print Shop--it was quick to do, since they were all numbered and filed. I got a bidding number and bid on one piece of art ("The Hound of the Baskervilles"). The only problem was that they wanted a photo id and New Jersey drivers' licenses have no photos. So after producing almost a dozen non-photo pieces, I remembered that I had my AT&T badge, with my picture on it. Note to con goers: bring a picture ID. (Not a problem for me next year--I will have my passport with me in Holland. Of course, transporting the art will be the major problem!)

The quality was high overall, higher than in some previous years, though the best pieces are either marked "Not for Sale" or priced such that they may as well be marked "Not for Sale." I noticed one artist had marked minimum bids of \$1 on all his pieces, trusting the crowd to bid them up. They did, though I'm not sure if he got as much as he had hoped. Still, it shows he has confidence in his work speaking for itself. The amount of media art was down--thank goodness!

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Con Suite

Rather than a traditional con suite, Noreascon 3 had the Concourse, a large exhibit hall with areas set aside for various exhibits (History of Worldcons, History of Fanzines, Costuming), freebie tables, message board, food service (fast food catered by ARA), and a lot of sitting areas where you could sit down and talk or read. (They also had a separate reading room, to which Mark and I donated a couple dozen books. We also lent our Constellation crab mallet and bib to the Worldcon exhibit.) While there were complaints about having to pay for the food (usually there are some free munchies in the Con Suite), I think the Concourse was a better idea, particularly as it was in the Hynes near the programming, rather than a long walk away in the Sheraton or the Hilton.

Programming

As I have said in previous con reports, it's impossible to see everything at a Worldcon, and this was no exception. (The Program Book lists 833 programming items!) I will therefore cover just the programming I attended. It's by no means complete, but it should give you some idea of what went on.

Panel: Computer Networking

Thursday, 2 PM

Saul Jaffe, Chuq von Rospach, Ben Yalow (mod)

This began with a summary of the existing networks (UUCP, Arpanet,

Fidonet, etc.). The best summary available is probably John Quarterman's article of a few years ago (in the ACM?). Quarterman was at Noreascon 3; one wonders why they didn't invite him. Or maybe they did but he declined.

The largest and best known "electronic fanzine" is SF-Lovers' Digest (of which Saul is the current moderator). It began as a research project to see if it could work. It could, and currently has thousands of readers. No one really knows how many; the arbitron statistics published monthly on Usenet don't take into account machines that gateway the Digest to internal networks (IBM is using BITNET gateways for a beta-test of TCP, and that is a huge hidden readership. The best guess the panel would make for its range is more than 100,000 machines (from PCs up to mainframe computers), and several million readers.

This success has not been without its drawbacks. It is generally agreed (by the panelists, and just about anyone else you ask) that the volume has increased faster than the content. "Flame wars" abound (several academic studies have been done on "electronic flaming," or insulting via electronic bulletins boards and/or mail. As Chuq said, "The computer flame war is a fine art. I have been practicing it for many years.... The best way to react is silence." Or to quote from W_a_r_G_a_m_e_s, "The only way to win is not to play."

The proposal was made that electronic bulletin boards in general and Usenet in particular need a "farm team" structure to solve the problem of uneducated users swamping the system with such postings as, "Has anyone ever read any Heinlein?" or "What time does the SF Bookstore close today?" As Chuq put it, "Usenet is 100,000 people running an apa." The results are what you would expect. Chuq's response, of course, was to go off and found O_t_h_e_r_R_e_a_l_m_s, which started as a strictly electronic fanzine, and later switched to producing hard-copy as well. Since he (and it) were nominated for Hugos this year, one can't say nothing good has come out of the system.

Another solution is mailing lists rather than newsgroups (bulletin boards), since mailing lists are much more limited in scope and the members generally more sophisticated. Several people proposed intelligent newsreading programs (for example, a program that could identify articles on topics you were interested in or by people whose

opinions you valued) to filter news. But of course that would mean that the garbage is still being transmitted, and that's not cheap.

As one audience member put it, the user education/sophistication level is a people problem and one shouldn't try to apply technological solutions to it, even though that seems to be the standard approach to any problem.

[The nice thing about computer panels is that the panelists are rarely pushing their own books while they're on the panel.]

Panel: The Writers Strike Back--Writers Review Critics
Thursday, 4 PM
George Alec Effinger, Kathe Koja, Sandra Miesel,
Lewis Shiner, Susan Shwartz (mod)

Are reviews valuable? The panelists agreed that a good review may help get your next book published even if the current book doesn't sell especially well. And if your current book _ d_ o_ e_ s sell well, a bad review probably won't affect getting your next book published. And a good review means respect and "ego-boo" and everyone enjoys that. (A bad review means you tell yourself the reviewer just didn't understand the book.)

The panelists were less agreed on whether a reviewer needs a science fiction background to review a science fiction book. Some claimed yes, and asked if Beowulf could be judged fairly by contemporary standards. Miesel said no and Shiner said yes, almost at the same instant. This may be more a reflection of their writing styles--

Shiner's work (especially _ D_ e_ s_ e_ r_ t_ e_ d_ C_ i_ t_ i_ e_ s_ o_ f_ t_ h_ e_ H_ e_ a_ r_ t_) is much more based in mainstream tradition and doesn't have a lot of science fiction trappings.

Effinger finds science fiction criticism apologetic: reviewers want to get science fiction "accepted" and at the same time impress the

reader with their own erudition rather than review the book. He says that authors should never try to refute a reviewer, especially in public, though he concedes that if a reviewer makes some obvious error

of fact, a letter to the reviewer pointing this out is not out of order. But a lengthy diatribe about how the reviewer was too blind to see the point the author was trying to make merely makes the author look foolish. Effinger claims he would rather have a well-thought-out bad review than a shallow good one, but also said he had never seen one such of his works (such chuckles here).

A member of the audience asked if an academic critic wasn't needed to put science fiction criticism at a literary level because s/he has the tools? Thomas Clareson (from the audience) responded that, "Some science magazines are for the general public, others for specialists. Literary critics are talking to themselves in ever-narrowing circles," and expressed the opinion that criticism should be accessible to all.

Miesel recommended (and I second) C. S. Lewis's E_x_p_e_r_i_m_e_n_t_i_n
C_r_i_t_i_c_i_s_m.

(Note that this is much more readable than Ezra Pound's A_B_C_o_f_R_e_a_d_i_n_g or Thomas Eagleton's L_i_t_e_r_a_r_y_T_h_e_o_r_y, both of which were heavily recommended at Readercon. My opinion is that this is typical of the differences between Readercon and a Worldcon--without criticizing either.)

As far as actually reviewing the critics, there wasn't very much.

Effinger and Shiner both said (in response to a question from the audience) that T_h_e_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 had fallen flat on its face, printing two kinds of articles. One was the very esoteric literary analysis that didn't make any sense, and the other was the shallow sort of review one finds everywhere else ("I really enjoyed this book because it had good characterization and a believable plot.")

As with most panels, the questioners from the audience tended to ramble on and on before getting to their question (if they ever did). A detailed review of critics will have to wait for another con and another panel.

Panel: Literary Incest--Are You Reading Fourth Generation Novels?

Thursday, 5 PM

John J. Kessel, Kathe Koja, Claudia O'Keefe, James Patrick Kelly (mod)

While the panelists agreed on the type of novel they were discussing (derivative works), they weren't sure which of the following four categories in specific was the topic:

- Theft (e.g., [possibly] R_e_d_A_l_e_r_t and F_a_i_l-S_a_f_e, which case was settled out of court)
- Imitation (e.g., Terry Brooks's S_w_o_r_d_o_f_S_h_a_n_n_a_r imitates Tolkien)
- Share-cropper (e.g., "Robot City" farmed out to various authors by Isaac Asimov)

- Homage (e.g., Solar Pons books as a homage to the Sherlock Holmes books)

Sometimes imitations or homages are an example of an author "trying to get it right" (or at least claiming that). The example one panelist mentioned was Alexei Panshin's R_i_t_e_o_f_P_a_s_s_a_g_e, written as a response to Heinlein's juveniles, which Panshin felt didn't handle female characters very well.

O'Keefe claimed one reason old ideas get reworked is that publishers don't like new ideas. (Neither do moviemakers--consider F_r_i_d_a_y_t_h_e_1_3_t_h_P_a_r_t_w_h_a_t_e_v_e_r_i_t_i_s). Kelly said it was "okay to borrow the furniture" but out and out theft is not permissible. I was all set to ask about shared universes (such as "Heroes in Hell") when the panelists mentioned Darkover, which has all sorts of people writing in that universe. And it sells. I would also suggest that repetitive series are nothing new--what about Tarzan? And Nancy Drew and Tom Swift still sell (though it is true that their audiences "turn over" more quickly than the audiences for adult novels).

Quest fantasies are overworked, according to some (which is not to say that there can't be good new quest fantasies). Willis pointed out that even fourth-generation novels descended from original ideas. J_a_n_e_E_y_r_e was original; Harlequin novels are not. Sometimes the story changes a bit. Yes, "Star Trek" took Fredric Brown's "Arena" and changed it. And Eando Binder's "I, Robot" begat Isaac Asimov's "Bicentennial Man." And Isaac Asimov's "Bicentennial Man" begat Star Trek's "Measure of a Man." And, verily, we will see this story even unto the fourth generation.

Readers prefer the familiar and identify with it, according to O'Keefe. And as Kelly said, "There's a lot of competence out there, but not a lot of originality." Kessel said this is because originality means challenging basic assumptions, and people have difficulty with that. On this subject of challenging basic assumptions and looking at things differently, Russell Hoban said in P_i_l_g_e_r_m_a_n_n, "We are, for example, clever enough to know that a year is a measure of passage, not permanence; we call the seasons spring, summer, autumn, and winter, knowing that they are continually passing one into the other. We are not surprised at this but when we give to seasons of another sort the

names Rome, Byzantium, Islam, or Mongol Empire we are astonished to see that each one refuses to remain what it is."

[This panel ties in with the _ S _ e _ v _ e _ n _ S _ a _ m _ u _ r _ a _ i described later.]

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Panel: Computer Networks and Viruses: How Close Are

_ N _ e _ u _ r _ o _ m _ a _ n _ c _ e _ r and _ S _ h _ o _ c _ k _ w _ a _ v _ e
_ R _ i _ d _ e _ r?

Thursday, 6 PM

Richard Stallman, Chuq von Rospach, Ben Yalow, Saul Jaffe (mod)

First the panelists' credentials: Stallman is developing a free operating system (and seems to be a bit of an anarchist), von Rospach works for Apple, Yalow works for City University of New York, and Jaffe works for Rutgers University, all in the fields of computers and networking. Though the title was "viruses," one of the major topics was the "Internet worm." When someone described that worm as benign and harmless, it was pointed out that the time spent tracking it down, combined with the time spent by engineers and others who sat idle while their computers were inaccessible, amounted to a considerable financial damage. Eventually, even those audience members who started out saying "Well, it was only the big companies who were hurt and it felt good to see them suffer" had to admit that a lot of other people were hurt as well. IBM, for example, cut themselves off from the Internet and this meant that the usual electronic means of communication customers could use to get questions answered or problems resolved were not functioning.

Some basic principles were stated. More security in operating systems leads to less functionality in information exchange by making it more difficult. Mac viruses tend to be more benign than PC ones. (No one gave any reason or justification for this.)

Several non-standard examples of disasters were given.

Accidentally deleting your own files is the most common example of destruction and, all things considered, may cost the most in terms of person-hours. Then there is the migrating head-crash. The technicians put the diagnostic pack in a drive that has had a head-crash and damaged it, but not realizing this, proceeded to put this pack in several other drives and destroyed them all as well. The example the panelists gave was of a PDP-11, so must be several years old, but I know of at least one recent instance with Vaxes. And Stallman observed that the "adventure" program was a virus--it merely used a human vector to transmit it from machine to machine. People _ w _ a _ n _ t _ e _ d to put it on their machine!

The panelists also agreed that backups are vital, but.... How do you know your backups are good? The most dangerous virus, they felt, would be a "time bomb" that did nothing but randomly scramble the data on backups for a year or two, then deleting everything on the system. This suggests that having different types of backups would help, unless the perpetrator was an insider who knew of all the types. This also works only if no one reads the backups in the interim and discovers what's going on. So having users who regularly need files restored from backup may be a blessing in disguise!

Why do people write worms and viruses? Many reasons were given: ego-boo, social malcontents, "see what I can do," and even industrial

espionage. Stallman saw viruses and worms as an almost political protest, people fighting against a repressive system. He claimed that the more restrictive the operating system, the more likely people were to attempt to sabotage it. However, the statistics presented by other panelists seem to indicate that it is the most open systems which are attacked, and that familiarity has more to do with it than repressiveness. (UNIX* systems are attacked far more frequently than MVS systems, even though the latter are much more restrictive.)

One of the major dangers is that systems will become too top-heavy with virus protections. And as Yalow summed up, "What you can build you can break."

This panel was very well-attended. In spite of the subtitle, neither _ N _ e _ u _ r _ o _ m _ a _ n _ c _ e _ r and _ S _ h _ o _ c _ k _ w _ a _ v _ e

_ R_ i_ d_ e_ r were mentioned at all.

After this panel, Kate, Mark, and I went out and had dinner nearby at a restaurant whose name escapes me (two initials and a last name). Very good, and luckily not extremely crowded.

Party: Meet the Pros
Thursday, 8:30 PM

As program participants, Mark and I actually each got a free drink at this. Therefore we felt obliged to mingle with the rabble.... But seriously, this gave us a chance to see a bunch of people that we probably wouldn't have run into otherwise, including a whole bunch of Midwestern fans that Dale had been telling us about (and telling them about us). Now we all got to attach faces to names. We also spent some time talking to the people who ran Contraption and Mark got an update on how the fantasy origami book was coming from David Stein.

Panel: Creationism, Educationalism, & the End of the U. S. Space Program
Friday, 10 AM
Arthur Hlavaty, Charles R. Pellegrino, Milton A. Rothman, Hal Clement (mod)

The panelists started by saying that while there was a lot of talk about creationism in schools, there wasn't actually very much of it in the public schools. There isn't much evolution either, at least in the textbooks, but this is changing, according to Rothman. As for the situation in private (religious) schools, it was pointed out that not many physicists were coming out of Catholic schools fifty years ago, but now they are producing their share.

* UNIX is a registered trademark of AT&T.

A connection with science does not preclude religious belief: one astronaut did ESP experiments while orbiting the moon and another went

searching for Noah's Ark when he got back from the moon. As to whether there was any correlation (either positive or negative) between religious belief and scientific belief, no one provided any answers.

One problem in the schools is the teacher (usually a science teacher) who says, "Question everyone, but not me." This inconsistency is almost guaranteed to convince students that all the talk of science being open is bunk. Of course, science has a negative image in general--everyone blames it for society's ills and no one thinks about how life would be without science ("nasty, brutish, and short" is the operative description here).

Science looks for the causes of events. Creationism attributes everything inexplicable to God. For example, the latest creationism argument against carbon dating of fossils is that there were massive changes in decay rates about 10,000 years ago (or perhaps it's that there was a single massive decay event at that time). The fact that such an event (or the rates necessary before the slow-down) would have created temperatures so high that the earth would have melted is apparently not addressed. (One is reminded of Clarence Darrow's description, during the Scopes Trial, of what would r e a l l y have happened if Joshua made the sun stand still.)

Pellegrino summed up the dichotomy as, "Science is based on doubt; creationism is based on faith." But as Hlavaty said, "Objectivity is an idea which we prize more as an ideal than as a way of life."

Panel: Alternate History Stories

Friday, 12 noon

Victor Raymond, Melissa Scott, S. M. Stirling, Stu Shiffman (mod)

First the authors promoted their alternate history books. Stirling will be coming out with U n d e r t h e Y o k e, a sequel to M a r c h i n g T h r o u g h G e o r g i a. Scott cited her A C h o i c e o f D e s t i n i e s and A r m o r o f L i g h t. Shiffman is doing a graphic novel, C a p t a i n C o n f e d e r a c y (which I think is coming out as a book under the title T h e C o n f e d e r a t e s).

They then broke alternate histories into two types: those about the alternatives (the change-points), or those set in the societies after the change has occurred. The most important thing for an author to do in either type is to separate the improbable from the impossible. Fantasy i s allowed, if that is part of your premise, but having Viking invaders in South America meet dinosaurs is definitely out. One book cited as not supporting the society derived from the change is Terry Bisson's F i r e o n t h e M o u n t a i n, described as a Marxist alternate history in which a slave uprising in the mid-19th Century results in a utopian society, apparently devoid of most government, with no explanation of how this came about. O p e r a t i o n C h a o s was cited as a science fantasy which (I think) they agreed was not alternate history. There has to be

a common history up to a certain point, not just the idea that "magic has always worked." Esther Friesner's D_r_u_i_d'_s_B_l_o_o_d has magic, yes, but there is also a definite split point at the Roman invasion of Britain.

Part of the trick is to try to get into the minds of people raised in different environments with different assumptions. Harry Turtledove's "Counting the Potsherds" does this, examining a world in which democracy never developed and people could understand only rule by a single individual.

Other books mentioned were John Brunner's T_i_m_e_s_w_i_t_h_o_u_t_N_u_m_b_e_r, Mack Reynold's O_t_h_e_r_T_i_m_e, and Robert Sobel's F_o_r_W_a_n_t_o_f_a_N_a_i_l (a wonderful alternate history in which the British win at Saratoga, written as a history book, complete with footnotes and bibliography! Some libraries have even unknowingly filed it in the history section!). When asked for change-points so far overlooked, the Russian Revolution and the rise of the Tokugawa Shogunate were mentioned. (What if the Japanese h_a_d_n't decided that guns were dishonorable?) I would note that Allen Appel's T_i_m_e_A_f_t_e_r_T_i_m_e does deal with the Russian Revolution, but no others come to mind.

I asked if "Wild Cards" was alternate history or whether it was too impossible. Stirling's response was that it was since it was scientifically presented and "if aliens had released gene-tailored viruses over New York in 1946 things would be very different." No one disagreed with this statement.

This panel also featured the first of many broken chairs. It seems that the backs of the audience's chairs were attached to the uprights with very short screws, so that if a large person leaned back, spreading the uprights apart, the back fell out. Just thought you'd want to know.

Panel: The Envelope Please--What Films Were Nominated and Why
Friday, 3 PM
Edward Bryant, Terry Erdmann, Craig Miller, Lee Orlando (mod)

(Kate began this panel by whispering to me, "Don't buy Canadian

gummi fish--they're awful." I thought I'd share that with you.)

The panelists began by listing (with some difficulty) the nominees:

_ A_ l_ i_ e_ n_ N_ a_ t_ i_ o_ n, _ B_ e_ e_ t_ l_ e_ j_ u_ i_ c_ e, _ B_ i_ g,
_ W_ h_ o_ F_ r_ a_ m_ e_ d_ R_ o_ g_ e_ r_ R_ a_ b_ b_ i_ t, and
_ W_ i_ l_ l_ o_ w.

Rather than go through why they were nominated (fairly obvious, one supposes), they said a little bit about each one. _ B_ i_ g, for example, though it is often lumped in with the many "body-swap" films of last year, was _ n_ o_ t a body-swap film. _ A_ l_ i_ e_ n_ N_ a_ t_ i_ o_ n, on the other hand, _ i_ s a police buddy picture (and apparently has spawned a television series!). Erdmann expressed surprise at its nomination.

_ B_ e_ e_ t_ l_ e_ j_ u_ i_ c_ e is a typical Tim Burton movie: it has no plot. (Burton's other films include _ P_ e_ e_ W_ e_ e_ B_ i_ g_ A_ d_ v_ e_ n_ t_ u_ r_ e and _ B_ a_ t_ m_ a_ n.) According to Erdmann, Burton doesn't work well with people, so when he

was chosen to direct _ B_ a_ t_ m_ a_ n, he asked for Keaton as Batman since he had worked with him before (in _ B_ e_ e_ t_ l_ e_ j_ u_ i_ c_ e) and wouldn't have to learn to deal with someone new.

Erdmann related what happened during last year's Hugo ceremonies. Apparently Orion was so sure they would win for _ R_ o_ b_ o_ c_ o_ p that they sent a crew to videotape the award ceremony, thinking they could use it for publicity. Of course, _ T_ h_ e_ P_ r_ i_ n_ c_ e_ s_ s_ B_ r_ i_ d_ e won instead and that was what the crew taped. When Erdmann returned to his seat after getting the award, one of the crew members leaned over and said, "Do you want this tape? We don't have any use for it." (This sounds odd; in effect, Orion would have been financing someone else's film--they paid the crew. But, hey, in Hollywood anything's possible.)

Films from 1988 overlooked in the Hugo process but still recommended included _ B_ u_ r_ n_ i_ n_ g_ L_ o_ v_ e, _ H_ a_ l_ f_ o_ f_ _ H_ e_ a_ v_ e_ n, _ T_ h_ e_ M_ i_ l_ a_ g_ r_ o_ B_ e_ a_ n_ f_ i_ e_ l_ d, _ W_ a_ r, _ M_ o_ n_ k_ e_ y_ s_ h_ i_ n_ e_ s, _ T_ h_ e_ y_ L_ i_ v_ e, and _ W_ i_ n_ g_ s_ o_ f_ D_ e_ s_ i_ r_ e.

Films mentioned for consideration for 1989 included *The Abyss*; *Fidelio*; *Dreams*; *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*; *Miracle Mile*; *The Navegators*; *Paper House*; and *Vampires Kiss*. I would add to that list *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. And I'm sure *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* will be on the list.

The consensus was that *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* would win. (It did.)

Panel: Build an Alternate History

Friday, 4 PM

Mark Keller, Sandra Miesel, Stu Shiffman, Harry Turtledove (mod)

When building an alternate history, one must pick a change-point. The panelists said it was easy to pick a military change-point, but difficult to pick an economic one. They talked about the "Paren Thesis" (I'm guessing on the spelling; it looks like a bad pun!), which claimed that Mohammed made the Middle Ages. They also talked about Hagarism, which postulates a Jewish empire instead of an Islamic one.

In building alternate histories, "one has to fudge a bit." So if things seem to work out too neatly in the next one you read, keep that in mind.

One scenario that was discussed at length was, "What if Lincoln died in 1864, the radical Republicans got into the White House, and at the end of the Civil War, the South was treated as conquered provinces?" Some suggested continuations included Texas joining Mexico instead of the United States, a slower Western expansion, a clamp-down on immigration in 1880 (instead of 1920) to keep potential Democrats out, and so on.

Examples of well-researched alternate histories were L. Sprague DeCamp's *Leviathan* and Sobel's *For Want of a Nail* (again!).

Examples of badly researched alternate histories were John Jakes's B_l_a_c_k
i_n_T_i_m_e and Kirk Mitchell's P_r_o_c_u_r_a_t_o_r (I'm glad I'm not the only
one

who disliked this, though I wouldn't be quite this harsh on it). It's
interesting that one of the best and one of the worst each deal with
"What if Rome never fell?" One symptom of a bad alternate history is to
postulate one change and then no change after that. The example given
was a hypothetical novel in which Carthage wins the Punic Wars and we
(in 1989 A.D.) are living under a Carthagenian Empire. Since we're not
living under a Roman Empire now, this seems unlikely.

Miesel mentioned that she has a book coming our soon which has
multiple alternate histories on the first page, but I didn't catch the
title (S_h_a_w_m_u_t?). She also has another which lists seven different
things that could have happened to Abraham Lincoln. (Neither are listed
in B_o_o_k_s_i_n_P_r_i_n_t or F_o_r_t_h_c_o_m_i_n_g
B_o_o_k_s.)

Panel: S_e_v_e_n_S_a_m_u_r_a_i, M_a_g_n_i_f_i_c_e_n_t
S_e_v_e_n, and B_a_t_t_l_e_B_e_y_o_n_d_t_h_e_S_t_a_r_s--
What Makes Them the Same?

Friday, 5 PM

Mark Leeper, Jim Mann, Darrell Schweitzer, Edward Bryant (mod)

To the films listed in the title of this panel, Mark added a
fourth, W_o_r_l_d_G_o_n_e_W_i_l_d, which he described as being done on such low a
budget that they had only six gunfighters.

There seemed to be a lot of interaction among these films. Though
the samurai film preceded the Western, Kurosawa was obviously much
influenced by Westerns in general. And in B_a_t_t_l_e_B_e_y_o_n_d_t_h_e
S_t_a_r_s, the
planet is Akira and the people the Akira, an obvious tribute to Kurosawa.

As to why Hollywood felt it necessary to remake S_e_v_e_n_S_a_m_u_r_a_i, Mark
said it reminded him of a cartoon of a board room meeting at which the
chairman says, "Ms Preeble's idea has merit; would one of you gentlemen
like to suggest it?" In other words, Hollywood recognizes only
Hollywood products as valid. A look at the Oscars supports this idea,
and in fact, a great deal of discussion about the Oscars ensued. People
didn't seem to realize that the films in the "Best Foreign-Language
Film" (n_o_t "Foreign Film") are nominated by their respective countries;
the Academy merely picks five from the list of one from each country
they are given. The category "Best Foreign-Language Film" would seem to
include films made in the United States in a foreign language. Would a
bilingual film (such as C_h_a_n_I_s_M_i_s_s_i_n_g) count? But I digress.

The love of retellings was expressed by Schweitzer as "producers
try to be the first one to be second." The linkage between Japanese and
Western films goes beyond this one instance and goes in both directions.

There is, for example, T_h_r_o_n_e_o_f_B_l_o_o_d, which is a retelling of
M_a_c_b_e_t_h.

In the other direction we have Y_o_j_i_m_b_o (which was retold as A
F_i_s_t_f_u_l_o_f

D_o_l_l_a_r_s), R_a_s_h_o_m_o_n (which was retold as T_h_e
O_u_t_r_a_g_e), and T_h_e_H_i_d_d_e_n
F_o_r_t_r_e_s_s (although I don't think of S_t_a_r_W_a_r_s as being a very
close
retelling of it).

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My feeling on listening to this panel was that people would enjoy a
panel on Japanese films in general, though how they could tie it into
science fiction I'm not sure. ("Japanese Fantasy Films," perhaps?)

After this panel we went to the hotel lobby where we met Manavendra
Thakur, a contributor to
r r r r e e e e c c c c . . . a a a a r r r r t t t t s s s s . . . m m m m o o o o v v v v i
i i i e e e e s s s s . . . r r r r e e e e v v v v i i i i e e e e w w w w s s s s on Usenet.
We had

arranged (somewhat ineptly on my part) to have dinner with him. I say
ineptly because had originally planned to meet at the Mandalay
Restaurant in Boston with him and Jerry Boyajian, but when we arrived we
discovered that there was no longer a Mandalay Restaurant in Boston. We
managed to call Manavendra and change the plans, but couldn't get in
touch with Jerry. (I still don't know what happened with him.)

We went to a Chinese restaurant nearby and spent a couple of hours
talking about film. This was made somewhat difficult by the fact that
we were joined by someone who wanted to talk about S_p_a_c_e_b_a_l_l_s when
Manavendra wanted to talk about Tarkovsky, but eventually it sorted
itself out (the fourth person had to return for another event) and we
had a good time.

Party: UMSFS
Friday, 7 PM

Well, the party started at 7 PM, but we didn't arrive until about
9. The biggest surprise was finding John MacLeod there. John was
Mark's roommate in college twenty years ago, and we've seen him twice
since graduation: once at a 15-year party for UMSFS, and now at the 25-
year party. (I should explain that UMSFS is the University of
Massachusetts Science Fiction Society, which when we were there was
called UMassSFS.) John hadn't really changed in all this time and
seeing him and Mark talking was like going back in time to college. I

heard from Chrissy that she received "Gidget Goes to Gar" (a.k.a. "Gidget Goes Gorean") from me, and we may actually see something produced by Boskone. I tried Razcal (raspberry/lime soda); it was good. Because of the corkage fees, there was no alcohol, though the UMSFS bunch usually has home-brewed beer. We also saw other people we hadn't seen for years, and I got to return to Matt the cassettes we had borrowed from him 2-1/2 years ago!

We looked out the window at one point to discover that the line for the Boxboro Party ("Louis Wu's 200th Birthday") was wrapped around the block. I had planned to drop by, but changed my mind and hung around with old friends instead. It was great, and we made sure to get addresses for people we had lost touch with. (Later on we ran into some other people from college as well who weren't at the party. Of course, having the convention in Boston made this particularly likely.)

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Panel: Back to Byzantium--Eastern Influences Are Here!

Saturday, 10 AM

Lillian Stewart Carl, Brenda Clough, Susan Shwartz,
Judith Tarr, Harry Turtledove (mod)

This panel began with long (and to me, boring) descriptions of how each of the panelists got interested in Byzantine history. To all of them, the Germanic and Celtic cultures lack subtlety; Turtledove described this as the Germanic wolves versus the Byzantine snakes. The only other interesting item was that Turtledove wrote under the name Eric Iverson (_ W _ e _ r _ e _ b _ l _ o _ o _ d and _ W _ e _ r _ e _ n _ i _ g _ h _ t). Mark and I both left early.

Panel: The New Classics

Saturday, 12 noon

Robert Colby, Alexis Gilliland, Brad Linaweaver,
Lewis Shiner, David Hartwell (mod)

They began by observing that at Conspiracy the classics that people

discussed were from the 1960s, not the 1940s. When a poll was taken of how many audience members had read B_e_y_o_n_d_T_h_i_s_H_o_r_i_z_o_n or S_l_a_n, the result was about 50%, the highest percentage Gilliland had seen in several conventions. It's true, though, that when people discuss the "classics of science fiction" they seem stuck forty years ago. One can of course argue that it takes that long to decide what's a classic, but then it's probably true that little is, because how much is it read today by the younger fans? Shiner claims that much of 1940s fiction is no longer relevant, with the role of women (and just about anyone else who wasn't white, male, and educated) being as ignored as it was. Perhaps the cyberpunk trend toward focusing on the less well-off members of society is a rebellion against this. Shiner in general is very articulate and literate on panels, much more so than many of the authors one sees, who know science fiction, but nothing outside the field (this is not meant to single out the other panelists on this panel, but is a general observation). Linaweaver felt that classics must have audacity; Hartwell said they needed originality.

Asked to name recent classics, they mentioned Ursula K. Leguin's L_e_f_t_H_a_n_d_o_f_D_a_r_k_n_e_s_s, Samuel R. Delany's N_o_v_a, and Robert Silverberg's D_y_i_n_g_I_n_s_i_d_e. Apparently a recent L_a_n'_s L_a_n_t_e_r_n did a correlation about the various "100 Best Novels" lists and the results of that matched the panelists' feelings pretty closely. Hartwell recommended A_r_s_l_a_n by M. S. Engh. Gilliland named Tom Clancy's H_u_n_t_f_o_r_R_e_d O_c_t_o_b_e_r, the novels of Stephen King, and Edgar Rice Burroughs's T_h_u_v_i_a, M_a_i_d_o_f M_a_r_s. (I have to disagree on the last one--I don't think anyone still reads it today.) Colby suggested Gene Wolfe's B_o_o_k_o_f_t_h_e_N_e_w_S_u_n, Keith Roberts's P_a_v_a_n_e, Barry Malzberg's H_e_r_o_v_i_t'_s_W_o_r_l_d, and Scott Bradfield.

Bradfield is a new author that Colby claims will have a cult following in five years. If he doesn't, Colby says you should remind him of this at a convention and he will buy you lunch. (He will probably never forgive me for printing this!) Shiner named L_e_f_t_H_a_n_d_o_f D_a_r_k_n_e_s_s, William Gibson's N_e_u_r_o_m_a_n_c_e_r, D_y_i_n_g I_n_s_i_d_e, David Brin's S_t_a_r_t_i_d_e_R_i_s_i_n_g

(Shiner says he does not consider this a classic, but suspects other people will), and _ B_ o_ o_ k_ o_ f_ t_ h_ e_ N_ e_ w_ S_ u_ n. Linaweaver mentioned Michael

Shaara's _ H_ e_ r_ a_ l_ d. And Eric Van (from the audience) suggested Shirley Jackson's _ H_ a_ u_ n_ t_ i_ n_ g_ o_ f_ H_ i_ l_ l_ H_ o_ u_ s_ e.

I also found out at this panel that Brad Linaweaver won the Prometheus Award for Best Libertarian SF Novel (for _ M_ o_ o_ n_ o_ f_ I_ c_ e) and L. Neil Schulman the Prometheus Hall of Fame Award (for _ A_ l_ o_ n_ g_ s_ i_ d_ e _ N_ i_ g_ h_ t).

It wasn't announced here, but Victor Koman was sitting in front me and had the plaques in his bag. At one point he took them out to get something else out and I could read them. I also saw that he had a copy of his novel _ T_ h_ e_ J_ e_ h_ o_ v_ a_ h_ C_ o_ n_ t_ r_ a_ c_ t which I was looking for, but which one

dealer said wouldn't be out for a couple of months. So after the panel I asked him when it would be available. He said it was out now. I said I had looked everywhere in the Dealers' Room but couldn't find it. His friend suggested, "Why not sell her this copy?" which he did and even autographed it. I mentioned the plaques and he asked me not to say anything to Linaweaver since the awards hadn't been announced yet. Since by now they have been announced, I can include them here.

Panel: What Would Fandom Be Like Today with No Computers?

Saturday, 1 PM

Teddy Harvia, Saul Jaffe, David Dyer-Bennet (mod)

Well, no one actually tried to answer the question. Instead, they discussed how fandom uses computers. There was the usual (desktop publishing, networking) and the frequently overlooked (mailing list management, program books). The panelists agreed that there would be no way to do a program book of 833 items, indexed, without computers. Some use computers heavily for correspondence, allowing them to send the same comments, slightly revised perhaps, to different people. One formats on the computer, then prints the output such that it will fit on a postcard, cuts it, and glues it onto one. One person mentioned publishing as shareware, but I don't think it's been done yet.

One hint of where fandom might have been is that apas are on the decline as networking becomes more widespread. Unfortunately, the computer graphics are not up to the level needed for fanzine art, even though some editors try to pretend they are. What the graphics do allow is their misuse; everyone is now a graphics designer, but not everyone is a _ g_ o_ o_ d graphics designer. We've all seen the convention flyers with eight different fonts (eight being the standard number provided with most graphics packages). The panelists recommend using two fonts in different point sizes to provide variation instead. They also said that while it used to be true that just producing a fanzine was considered praise-worthy, now that it's so much easier to do the mechanics, the content of fanzines has become more important.

Having authors on networks allows an interaction between fans and

authors that didn't exist before. (As Timothy Zahn said at the @ party, though, it can also tie up a lot of an author's time, and he avoids it

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for that reason.)

There is still a lack of knowledge about computers, and a certain amount of fear (I note that the Confiction sign-up forms require that you sign a statement saying that you realize this information will be stored on a computer, and think this is the result of stricter information control laws in Europe).

Fax was mentioned, but people agreed that fax was for pictures; e-mail was for words.

Presentation: 20th Century Fox Films
Saturday, 2 PM

The first film presented was Clive Barker's N_i_g_h_t_b_r_e_e_d (based on his novel C_a_b_a_l). It's about Midian, where the monsters, and has lots of shape-shifters and special effects, and is due out February 9, 1990.

Terry Erdmann's description of M_i_l_l_e_n_n_i_u_m gets some of the details wrong: It's the NTSB (National Transportation Safety Board), not the NAB (National Aeronautics Board), and the watches run backward rather than being set 45 minutes into the future. (I wonder if the script was changed during filming, or if it was re-edited after he saw it.)

Then was the documentary short on T_h_e_A_b_y_s_s (a.k.a. H_e_a_v_e_n'_s_T_a_n_k).

Most of what was talked about here has been discussed at great length already so I won't re-iterate it all. Erdmann did say that Biehn's psychological transformation was mostly cut, making him somewhat two-dimensional. A scene of a giant tsunami wave hanging over a city was also cut, but the footage may show up in the version that makes it to cassette or television.

E_x_o_r_c_i_s_t_1_9_9_0 is due out next June, and Roger Corman's F_r_a_n_k_e_n_s_t_e_i_n

U_n_b_o_u_n_d in September. An A_l_i_e_n_s videodisk is due out, and plans are in the works for A_l_i_e_n_3 and A_l_i_e_n_4. A_l_i_e_n_3 will not have

the William

Gibson script; he wrote it with Ridley Scott in mind as the director and when Scott pulled out, the script would have needed rewriting that Gibson didn't want to do.

For some reason William Shatner's T e k W a r was mentioned at the beginning of this presentation (though it's actually by Ron Goulart rather than Shatner). Maybe it's published by a subsidiary or something.

(To be continued)