



was just sort of an island universe. On a clear night you could see other galaxies, but they were pretty far away and we rarely saw the smoke from their campfires.

THE MT VOID

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In the 90s everything is competition. The Soviets have restructured for internal competition. "Nyet on this 'from each according to his means, to each according to his needs.' Da on supermarkets and Burger Kings. No more walls. Go if you like, trade where you like." Europe is banding together into its own United States to compete economically. I don't have to tell y\_o\_u about Bell and the Big Three autos.

And now for the 90s the whole dang galaxy is in competition. Wake up. Take a look at what is happening around you. All of the matter of the galaxy is under the influence of a huge competitor for matter ... the Great Attractor. I am not kidding you. It is 150,000,000 light-years away and it wants to "eat your lunch." Right now it looks to be a huge continent of hundreds of galaxies of dark matter. That's why we haven't seen it until now. Now, I know what you are telling yourself. "150,000,000 light-years is a long, long way off. Why worry?" That's what General Motors thought about Volkswagen.

Just a few years ago we thought everyone in the universe was just traveling directly away from the site of the Big Bang. Nobody knew where it was but we all were sure doing our best to get the heck away because, who knows, it might happen again! But now we are not just moving straight away--we are also veering to the right, right towards the Great Attractor. I am sure that the core of our galaxy is doing everything it can to keep us on course--I have always been a great fan of the core of our galaxy. But the pull of the Great Attractor may seem pretty inviting out at the rim.

These outer stars m\_u\_s\_t be made to realize the folly of their ways. As long as we were running away from the Big One at uniform speed, traffic problems were easily manageable. If we are all going to try to go to this Great Attractor fellow, we may not even get there. Galaxies may collide with each other in their headlong rush to become part of the Great Attractor. How long can it be before

we start hearing reports of "near misses."

I will keep an eye on the situation and let you know when the crisis is starting. In the mean time, I suggest you stock up on canned goods.

2. Lorraine Kevra has donated Diane Duane's S\_p\_o\_c\_k's\_W\_o\_r\_l\_d and Peter Morwood's S\_t\_a\_r\_T\_r\_e\_k: R\_u\_l\_e\_s\_o\_f\_E\_n\_g\_a\_g\_e\_m\_e\_n\_t to the LZ science fiction club library. [-ecl]

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

We trained hard, but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form up into teams we would be reorganized.

I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganizing; and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency and demoralization.

--Petronius Arbiter, 210 B.C.

THE HUNT FOR RED OCTOBER  
A film review by Mark R. Leeper  
Copyright 1990 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: Even though very much cut down from the novel, T\_h\_e\_H\_u\_n\_t\_f\_o\_r\_R\_e\_d\_O\_c\_t\_o\_b\_e\_r is a good action yarn with an air of authenticity. While it is less of a film than fans of the book had hoped for, it is a crowd-pleaser. Rating: +2.

Tom Clancy created a new market for the techno-thriller genre of story-telling with his 1984 novel T\_h\_e\_H\_u\_n\_t\_f\_o\_r\_R\_e\_d\_O\_c\_t\_o\_b\_e\_r. This genre is intended to tell a crackling good story about the military and at the same time include a lot of "executive summary" explanations about what equipment is used, how strategy is determined, and anything else about defense that comes up in the course of the story. There was enough technical detail--though its accuracy has since been questioned--that the book became the first fiction publication of the Naval Institute Press, whose usual fare was dry reference material on subject matter such as tides. The book quickly became that rarity today, a book that

was not just a best-seller by its own admission, but also in the public's perception. When T\_h\_e\_H\_u\_n\_t\_o\_f\_R\_e\_d\_O\_c\_t\_o\_b\_e\_r made it to paperback, you saw a\_l\_o\_t of people reading the paperback. (Personal note: shortly after the paperback came out, I read it on a boat with less than a hundred passengers and I saw at least three other copies being read.) Now that best-seller has been filmed.

Part of the irony of the film coming out now is that while the source was greatly popular, it was all about the Cold War defense chess game that the NATO countries play with the Soviet Union. It is quite possible that the genre that the book fostered is itself going to be the victim of new, friendlier relations with the Soviet Union as, at least in the public perception, the Cold War seems to be coming to an end. I have yet to hear anyone say that the nuclear submarine fleet is being dismantled or that anyone has backed off of the edge-of-nuclear-war defense routine, so there may still be material for new techno-thrillers that work as something other than restricted period pieces.

The reason that T\_h\_e\_H\_u\_n\_t\_f\_o\_r\_R\_e\_d\_O\_c\_t\_o\_b\_e\_r could still be filmed is that the plot did not include anything the public would have known about at the time so the film could still take the stance that this whole story is true and the proof is that both the Americans and the Soviets deny that it ever happened. However, some of the edge is taken off the story because the book gets its real tension from the ever-present possibility that the events told will lead to a nuclear strike on the United States. Read as a contemporary novel in 1984 or shortly after, that was a real possibility for what could take place in the story. That Sword-of-Damocles tension is missing from the film because--and I say this as only a minor spoiler--there do not appear to have been any

nuclear strikes on major American cities at any time in the early 1980s.

"On November 13, 1984, approximately four months before Mikhail Gorbachev took power in the Soviet Union" (the story begins), the Soviets had a new super-submarine, the Red October, which featured a nearly silent underwater jet-propulsion system. This nifty little gimcrack has but one conceivable use. It is unstoppable as a first-strike device that undetected could nuzzle up close to the American coastline and then start firing nuclear missiles. And for the maiden voyage of the super-sub they had chosen to command their top submarine

commander Marko Ramius (played by Sean Connery). Their joy at this great Cold War victory was short-lived, however. Ramius steals the Red October and heads it for parts unknown. Now both sides desperately want to get their hands on the Red October and neither side knows for sure what Ramius intends to do with the submarine.

It is, of course, impossible to take all of the action of a novel such as T\_h\_e\_H\_u\_n\_t\_f\_o\_r\_R\_e\_d\_O\_c\_t\_o\_b\_e\_r and put it into a film of standard length. It is even more true with this novel than it would be for most novels, since the original was very heavy with military aircraft of many different sorts, very few of which made it to the film adaptation. They seem to have whittled down the novel with a very large knife. One of the most lamentable deletions was Ramius's actual motivation for doing what he is doing. In the book that made the character what he was and added a very tragic dimension to his character and at the same time said something worth saying about life in the Soviet Union. Perhaps in an effort to make all its negative statements about the Soviets applicable \_o\_n\_l\_y to the pre-Gorbachev years, the film blunts its social statement that still might be applicable. The bad guy of this film is a Soviet point of view that is seen as being strictly pre-Gorbachev. Another lamented deletion, if only because I would have liked to see Industrial Light and Magic's visual rendering, is that there is no nuclear meltdown on a Soviet submarine. This scene was a descriptive centerpiece for the novel and it should have been a visual centerpiece of the film.

That brings us to the visual effects that were in the film. They were sufficient to tell the story and occasionally very nice indeed but surprisingly shoddy in other places. One in particular that did not work is showing a torpedo coming at the viewer. The technique they used, harkening back to effects of the 1960s, is to superimpose a picture of the torpedo on the background and then just increase the size of the inset picture. You see this technique in films such as R\_o\_b\_i\_n\_s\_o\_n\_C\_r\_u\_s\_o\_e\_o\_n\_M\_a\_r\_s, which had a budget a small fraction of that of T\_h\_e\_H\_u\_n\_t\_f\_o\_r\_R\_e\_d\_O\_c\_t\_o\_b\_e\_r. In truth, it is done better here but it still robs the scene of some of the three-dimensional effect. The film also had a problem with some obvious matte lines. I suspect, however, the film needs to take some liberties with visual effects if for no other reason than that seeing actual submarine fights at the proper depth it might be difficult for the viewer to see very much or to tell what is going on. The underwater visuals probably told the story more clearly than was realistic for them to tell it.

Also adding to the effect is a score by a master film composer whose work is all too rarely heard, Basil Polidouris. He has scored at least two films before on the theme of American-Soviet relations, R\_e\_d\_D\_a\_w\_n and A\_m\_e\_r\_i\_k\_a, though his masterpiece was his rich and varied score for C\_o\_n\_a\_n\_t\_h\_e\_B\_a\_r\_b\_a\_r\_i\_a\_n, by far the best thing about that film. In T\_h\_e\_H\_u\_n\_t\_f\_o\_r\_R\_e\_d\_O\_c\_t\_o\_b\_e\_r, his score seems to have been influenced by the music of the Russian Army Chorus and Band. And while it may not have been a very original or creative choice, it certainly was a proper one and the choral pieces do make for magnificent sections of music.

Finally, some mention should be made of the casting. Sean Connery, of course, was not the first choice for Ramius. That choice was German actor Klaus Maria Brandauer whom Sean Connery defeated in N\_e\_v\_e\_r\_S\_a\_y\_N\_e\_v\_e\_r\_A\_g\_a\_i\_n and whom he beat one more time in the casting of T\_h\_e\_H\_u\_n\_t\_f\_o\_r\_R\_e\_d\_O\_c\_t\_o\_b\_e\_r. I suspect Brandauer could have done Ramius a little better since he does not have a Scottish accent. And perhaps to the ears of the public a German accent sounds more Russian than a Scottish one does. However, if the public thinks that Edinburgh-raised Connery does not sound sufficiently Russian, the producers could counter that he really is not supposed to be. Ramius is not Russian--he is Lithuanian! Actually, accents brings up one of the film's major implausibilities. It is hard to believe that any Biblical passage, no matter how powerful, could make an entire Soviet submarine crew speak English and not even realize they were doing it. (That's an inside joke for people who have seen the film.)

Second lead went to Alec Baldwin as CIA analyst Jack Ryan, a continuing character in Clancy's novels. Baldwin, who played the somewhat simpy ghost-husband in B\_e\_e\_t\_l\_e\_j\_u\_i\_c\_e, is actually a very good Ryan, a family man with a fear of flying who also has just a bit of Sherlock Holmes in him. He has a very winning combination of high competence and vulnerability. Like Ramius, he is also a renegade with very strong opinions. One of the nice touches of the script (and counter to the cliché) is that while Ramius has actually read Ryan's books on military history, he does not think very much of them.

T\_h\_e\_H\_u\_n\_t\_f\_o\_r\_R\_e\_d\_O\_c\_t\_o\_b\_e\_r has a heavy sprinkling of familiar faces in other roles. Scott Glenn is crisp as submarine captain Marcuso. Sam Neill is a little too sugary as Ramius's second-in-command. Then there is James Earl Jones, Joss Ackland, Richard Jordan (in a role as a wily politician that is somewhat of a departure for him), Peter Firth, Tim Curry (as the Red October's goggle-eyed surgeon), and Jeffrey Jones.

While this seems more a Readers' Digest condensation of the Clancy novel, much scaled down for the big screen, it certainly is a good adventure yarn, particularly welcome because it was not saved for a summertime release. I rate it a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

GRUMBLES FROM THE GRAVE by Robert A. Heinlein  
Del Rey, 1989, ISBN 0-345-36246-2, \$19.95.  
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper  
Copyright 1990 Evelyn C. Leeper

This collection of letters and letter excerpts was apparently planned by Heinlein before his death as a way to provide some income to his widow. (Of course, the royalties his books continue to collect help as well.) The letters cover a wide range of topics, concentrating mostly on his writing style, but also covering cats, houses, politics, fans, penguins, and just about everything else. There are a few cases in which names have been omitted, on the advice of his lawyers, and many of the letters are excerpted rather than included in full.

Now, everyone else has oohed and aahed over this book, and I don't mean to rain on their parade, but as someone who did   n  o  t grow up reading Heinlein, I just can't get that excited about this book. (My childhood was spent reading John W. Campbell's   T  h  e  M  o  o  n  I  s  H  e  l  l and "Black Star" series, which probably explains why I've ended up the way I have, but that was what my library had.) My personal opinion (which you are free to ignore, of course) is that Heinlein wrote some great short stories and some okay novels--and some really bad novels as well. Given that, I don't view this book as the Apocrypha of a great body of work, an appellation more suited to L. Ron Hubbard than to Heinlein anyway (though with   S  t  r  a  n  g  e  r  i  n  a  S  t  r  a  n  g  e  L  a  n  d one might make the religious connection for Heinlein as well). It is of interest, but no more or less so to me than a similar book of another's author's letters would be. I found the parts dealing with his writing more interesting than the parts discussing the building of his house, for example. On the other hand, I would go into ecstasy over a book of Olaf Stapledon's letters, so let that tell you something about my tastes.

In any case, as they say, your mileage may vary.

Boskone 27

(Part 1)

Con report by Evelyn C. Leeper and Mark R. Leeper  
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[This con report is a joint effort. Most of the general information has been written by Evelyn; the panels on which Mark is reporting are so labeled.]

Boskone was at last able to move back to Presidents' Day weekend, though with fewer people getting this "holiday" off work than in the past, the programming was limited to Friday evening through Sunday night. Just as last year, traffic was wretched between Hartford and Springfield, leading me to believe it is now a permanent traffic jam, at least in winter. (I suspect skiers heading north on Friday make the situation worse, since our summertime trips don't seem to meet these delays.)

Mark's and my registration materials were both in the Green Room as planned. (Since Boskone doesn't pre-stuff envelopes but hands out the loose items, all this meant was that the badges had to be in the right place.) Upon reading my schedule I discovered that they had scheduled me for an autograph session! On the participant's form, they had asked "Should we schedule you for an autograph session?" and I had jokingly answered, "Yes, but I have no books." I had also added that it was a

joke, but the person scheduling didn't see that, so there I was. (I eventually found the person and un-scheduled myself; apparently no horde of fans were waiting for my autograph anyway!)

## Hotels

They had finished the construction that made travel between the Tara and the Marriott so difficult last year, so the easiest way was out the door and across the street. The only problem with this was that it was very cold and windy and unless you carted your coat around with you it was not inviting. The seating space in the hotel areas near the meeting rooms was less than last year, but still sufficient, and fans when necessary will sit on the floor anyway.

Whereas last year there was a shortage of hotel rooms, this year Boskone didn't make its block, but did turn back the sixty extra rooms in time for the hotels to re-sell them (at higher rates!) to the general public, probably skiers.

## Dealers' Rooms

The setup of having a dealers' room in each hotel continued, and will for the foreseeable future. There just isn't enough space in any one room to put all the dealers there without seriously impacting the programming.

Some people said there were too many books in the dealers' rooms. Impossible! Well, it is true that some of the dealers feel that there may be more book dealers than a 1000-person Boskone (which this was) can support, but no one seems to want to be the one cut out, so they'll just have to live with it, I suppose. They could always pull themselves out if they were losing money. I found out later that the dealers' room is mostly books because a certain percentage of the space is reserved for book dealers, and that in addition, they pay a cheaper rate for the space.

In any case, I had a chance to talk to several of the regulars. I discussed the Readercon Small Press Awards with Greg Ketter, owner of Dreamhaven Books in Minneapolis and another judge on the panel. I also stopped by Mary Southworth's table. She has just opened a mystery and

science fiction shop in Saratoga Springs in upstate New York. Her table used to be a bastion of used books; now it seems to be mostly new, and in addition they are all filed together, so you can't look through just the used books (for example). And, of course, this also means that there are far fewer used books, since her table space hasn't increased. Dick Spelman was there, with all new books--and right across from Mary. I can't help but feel that her new sales were lower because of the competition.

(I also managed to accumulate a lot of old issues of Amazing and Fantastic from the freebie table where someone got rid of a couple of hundred old magazines.)

### Art Show

I got to the Art Show only once, and found it again of little interest. They seem to have turned into a combination of bad art for sale and good art marked NFS ("Not For Sale"), which someone has pointed out seem to be mostly large advertisements for the print shop. It is nice that the print shop has some affordable art, but it used to be that the originals were affordable.

### Film Program

The film program consisted of science fiction films without special effects. Films included Charly, Alphaville, AroundtheWorldinEightyDays, TheManintheWhiteSuit, AConnecticutYankeeinKingArthur'sCourt, Quinte, and Seconds. Good choices, but since I have already seen them all (and have several of them on videotape) I had no great desire to spend my convention time watching them.

### Programming

The science track seems to have vanished, though there were a couple of items that might qualify--such as a panel on lab accidents. Somehow this is not the same as a real scientist talking about what's happening.

## The First Night

When we arrived Laurie Mann asked if we wanted to join her at Champions (the hotel bar) for a quick snack. This sounded good until we got there and discovered the decibel level was such that no conversation would be possible. So she went off to grab something in the staff lounge, and we made a quick pass through both dealers' rooms and, sure enough, found Dave, Kate, and Barbara just outside the Tara one. (I also grabbed up three books for a friend in one as I was whipping through.)

Since they wanted to try the Student Prince's "game festival," we went there. I had bear stew; Mark had pheasant. The bear was not strong-tasting and very tender. Mark's pheasant, on the other hand, had a very strong flavor.

We returned too late for the "Meet the VIPs" party, so went directly to the Noreascon 3 party. First we had a long discussion with Laurie, culminating in our decision that she was really a neo, since she hadn't attended Noreascon \_ 1. Then we got into an extended discussion with Eric Van about Readercon and Gene Wolfe. I complained that given that Readercon has rock-'n'-roll panels, and was thinking about having an art show next year, it was getting just too media-oriented. Eric defended the rock-'n'-roll panels by saying that rock-'n'-roll has lyrics; I countered by pointing out that movies have dialogue. I think I was awarded the point.

Then Dave started in baiting Eric about Gene Wolfe, saying that he thought Wolfe a boring writer. (He does think this, but admitted to us later that he was perhaps more argumentative than he might have otherwise been.) Much of the argument was about semantics: Eric said that Wolfe was provably the best respected writer in the field, which Dave chose to interpret as saying that Wolfe was provably the best writer in the field. (And yes, I mean "provably," not "probably.") The former claim can be tested: just count up reviewers' opinions. The latter is, however, not "provable" in any objective fashion. In spite of all this, we spent more than a half-hour arguing about this topic, which led Mark to label Dave as "the goy who fried Wolfe."

We also discussed the Kirk Poland Bad Prose Contest, which in spite of previous assurances will be held this year at Readercon. Eric says after this year they will give it a rest, but I've heard this before. Luckily, it is being held separately from the awards ceremony so I will not be forced to attend.

We finally left about 1 AM. On the way out we passed a stuck elevator--containing Robert Colby and Eric Van. Well, at least they had a chance to do some more planning for Readercon!

When we finally got back to Dave's house and got out of the car, we heard the most amazing noises. After a couple of seconds, I realized

what it was. It was the ice that covered the trees creaking, clacking, melting, and falling. For a normally quiet area, it was extremely noisy!

\_ S \_ F \_ S \_ p \_ e \_ c \_ i \_ a \_ l \_ t \_ y \_ H \_ o \_ u \_ s \_ e \_ s  
Saturday, 11 AM

David Hartwell (mod), Darrell Schweitzer, Brian Thomsen,  
Gordon Van Gelder

Apparently one of the great advantages of being a specialty house (a.k.a. "small press") is that you can get away with a lot more without being sued. David Hartwell gave the example of Paul O. Williams's upcoming book on the "100 Best Rock 'n' Roll Songs." Normally, one must pay royalties when one quotes a song. However, this would have run into somewhere between \$50,000 and \$100,000 for royalties alone, so Williams went to a small press to have the book published sans royalty payments on the theory that the Beatles et al would not think it worthwhile to sue someone with hardly any money. (Apparently the idea that being in such a book would be good publicity is not likely to occur to the Beatles et al, and as one panelist pointed out, the Beatles do not really need this publicity anyway.)

This is not to say that small presses are dishonest. True, some take a long time to pay the authors their royalties, but you also have people such as Lloyd Eshbach, who sold off his own collection to pay off Fantasy Press's debts when it went under.

One area in which small presses specialize is the limited edition. Here the opportunities for fraud, or at least something resembling fraud, abound. A publisher may, for example, claim that a book has been published in a limited, numbered edition of 500 copies. But s/he may also produce another 26 lettered copies as presentation copies. This is not unusual, and is frequently openly announced. But it may go further, and a hundred presentation copies be produced, or more. For a large print run an extra hundred copies is insignificant; for a "limited edition" it can have a major impact on the scarcity, and hence the value.

The upshot of all this is that the panelists look very askance at the limited edition field. There are some genuine limited editions, but

people looking for books as an investment would do better to buy ordinary first editions of future "mega-authors." Early Stephen King novels, for example, are quite valuable, as are 1950s hardcover editions of such authors as Heinlein and Farmer. The trick, of course, is in knowing who will become popular. If you can do that, you belong in the publishing industry to start with. A very small print run, or the accidental destruction of most of the print run, can increase the value

of "large press" books as well; examples given included first editions

of Jonathan Carroll's L\_a\_n\_d\_o\_f\_L\_a\_u\_g\_h\_s, Gene Wolfe's

S\_h\_a\_d\_o\_w\_o\_f\_t\_h\_e

T\_o\_r\_t\_u\_r\_e, Roger Zelazny's N\_i\_n\_e\_P\_r\_i\_n\_c\_e\_s\_i\_n

A\_m\_b\_e\_r, and R. A. Lafferty's

F\_a\_l\_l\_o\_f\_R\_o\_m\_e. (First editions of first books in series that later

become enormously popular are good bets.) Something else that can make a book valuable is its poor construction--yes, p\_o\_o\_r construction.

Giger's N\_e\_c\_r\_o\_n\_o\_m\_i\_c\_o\_n is valuable because it is so large and so poorly bound, that most copies have already fallen apart. So if yours is in one piece, you have something unusual. But I digress.

Even less honest than the "limited edition" ploy is the technique of choosing authors for an anthology such that the autograph plate is what is valuable. Hartwell cited Don Herron's R\_e\_i\_g\_n\_o\_f\_F\_e\_a\_r (published by Underwood-Miller) in which a couple of authors whose autographs were valuable seem to have been chosen solely for that reason. What you have then is the situation in which the book is little more than an extremely fancy ad for the autograph plate.

The nostalgia of older fans is something else that small presses have tried to cater to (or capitalize on, depending on your point of view), yet this is generally unsuccessful. There aren't enough older fans buying small press books to support a publication aimed just at them. An example of this that was given was an attempt to reprint Nelson Bond's books. I have to agree that this was not likely to reach the latest generation of fans, but I suspect something like the Donald Wandrei collection just issued may be more successful.

Another stumbling block is overprinting. A book that is a financial success in a print run of 500 copies, may lose money in a print run of 750. The margin may, in fact, be even tighter. This is

not the same thing, by the way, as the deliberate overrun of a "limited edition." If anything, I suppose it is the reverse, and has the reverse effect. A deliberate overrun in limited editions often results in more profit for the publisher, while overestimating demand results in a loss.

One area in which the small press has been very successful is the collection/anthology field. According to Darrell Schweitzer, the small press has "taken this area away" from the larger press. This may be true of the critically acclaimed collections and anthologies in hardcover, but there are still a lot of good anthologies out there in the "large press."

Another aspect of the small press is that it can publish books cheaply. Robert Price was cited as someone who has published several books of bad poetry and  T h e C r y p t o f C t h u l h u. Since they cost only a few dollars apiece, he is able to sell enough of them to pay for the print run of a few hundred, whereas a large publisher could never sell enough to pay for their minimum print run in the thousands.

From a bookseller's point of view, the small press is a problem. To attract the buyers away from the mainstream bookstores, a specialty science fiction shop or mail order business has to offer them, yet unlike most books they are unreturnable to the publisher for credit. This means a bookseller has to have a very good idea of how many s/he can sell, or be willing to keep a large backlog. In addition, the

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discounts given by small presses to dealers are minimal.

At some point, the term "self-published" was mentioned. When I asked how this was different from a vanity press, Schweitzer replied that the difference was the profit motive. "Self-published" authors plan on making a profit; authors using a vanity press usually do not. This led to a discussion of whether Bridge Publications is a vanity press; the panelists seemed to feel that its main function was to make L. Ron Hubbard respectable. (Schweitzer suggested a panel on "Great Science Fiction Frauds: L. Ron Hubbard, Whitley Streiber, and Beyond.")

I finally asked for a definition of "small press." Apparently Readercon has one ("a small press is one that supports fewer than two

people full-time") but didn't bother to let the judges know. Someone on the panel pointed out that by this definition, F&S F was a small press. (I asked Robert Colby about this later; he said that there were some additional rules, and one was that any magazine ineligible for the semi-prozine or fanzine Hugos because of circulation was no longer considered "small press.")

When asked what they would like to see the small press do, the panelists seemed to like the idea of a horror series similar to Lin Carter's "Adult Fantasy Series." But they would prefer to see this more as reading copies than as collectibles. (That makes sense--they want people to have a chance to read the stuff!)

U\_n\_t\_h\_i\_n\_k\_a\_b\_l\_e W\_r\_i\_t\_i\_n\_g\_A\_b\_o\_u\_t\_t\_h\_e

Saturday, 11:00 AM

James Morrow (mod), Bruce Coville, Kathryn Cramer,  
Patrick Neilsen-Hayden  
[written by Mark R. Leeper]

This panel was a sort of a counterpoint to the midnight panels where the panelists tend to be thinking about the unwritable. Here instead was a discussion of catastrophe and Armageddon in science fiction. James Morrow, who moderated, opened the panel with three discussion questions:

1. What is the morality of writing about a serious subject such as the Apocalypse "for fun and profit"?
2. Why is there an almost sexual fascination with Armageddon?
3. In the light of recent events in Eastern Europe, has nuclear war lost its place as a theme of science fiction?

It was these three interesting questions that the panelists proceeded to ignore in the discussion. Cramer made the observation that almost by definition there is something optimistic about Armageddon fiction. After all, these stories pretty much have to be told by survivors. She also discussed how each generation thinks about

disasters differently. Two decades ago the common perception was that the major disasters threatened us all. The view in fiction was that the whole world would buy it. Today we have grown used to the threat of disaster and we think more in terms of how to protect ourselves individually. Rather than worrying about the dam breaking and what can be done to stop it, people now think more in terms of finding a plot of land on high ground. Back at the turn of the century the literature did not look so much at survival at all but at the effects and horror of the disaster. Their with descriptions of disasters were punctuated with images of screaming women carrying dead babies. There is far less of that in current fiction.

Coville picked up on the need to have a survivor, saying that no matter how bad things get in the catastrophe story, it should leave the reader with the impression that there is some hope so as to give the reader the strength to go on. I personally disagree here since the only hope that need be present is that the disasters have not yet happened.

Probably the best apocalyptic novel I can point to is Philip Wylie's E\_n\_d\_o\_f\_t\_h\_e\_D\_r\_e\_a\_m, and there is little doubt that that novel ends within minutes of the end of mankind. Coville sees us as what he called the

"disempowered generation." Disasters before the 1950s dealt with either anarchist plots or Martians causing the disaster. There is more of a sense now that we are all part of a machine moving to its own

destruction. (I am not sure that T\_h\_e\_P\_o\_i\_s\_o\_n\_B\_e\_l\_t\_o\_r\_T\_h\_e\_P\_u\_r\_p\_l\_e\_C\_l\_o\_u\_d

were really happening to a more "empowered" generation.) It is no longer aliens or anarchists at fault, but we all are in small part the people bringing about the end.

Morrow, who now has children, saw that as a need for optimism in spite of the fact that even the home, once the bastion of security, is now besieged by radon gas and electro-magnetic radiation. Still, there is some solace that the predictions of disaster are not all that accurate. In the 1970s Paul Ehrlich predicted the 1980s as being a decade of world-wide starvation. The truth was not nearly so bad.

Neilsen-Hayden saw a fascinating deconstruction in apocalyptic

stories. In T\_h\_e\_W\_a\_r\_o\_f\_t\_h\_e\_W\_o\_r\_l\_d\_s Wells wanted to show that society is

vulnerable and power is transient. Neilsen-Hayden enjoys seeing boring, self-important Victorians meeting screaming death by heat rays.

Neilsen-Hayden enjoys a sort of lyrical beauty in the destruction of Earth at the end of F\_o\_r\_g\_e\_o\_f\_G\_o\_d.

Morrow warned against writers making the reader identify too closely with the survivor since that breeds a sort of complacency. To

me a prime example would be W\_h\_e\_n\_W\_o\_r\_l\_d\_s\_C\_o\_l\_l\_i\_d\_e, but his example was

A\_l\_a\_s,\_B\_a\_b\_y\_l\_o\_n, a novel that he found "immoral" for this reason. Cramer, carrying on with this idea, suggested that in the really classic disasters--the Biblical stories of Noah's Flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah--the people who were killed were evil and we are the descendants of the good people who were saved. While this attitude seems less appropriate in literature that is trying to get away from

ethno-centricity, it did show up in real life after the recent San Francisco earthquake. The attitude was that there is availability of information on where the fault lines lie and what the effects of quakes are on cities. The people who ignored this information were stupid and that is why they died.

With the assistance of David Hartwell in the audience, the conversation turned to why there is not a great literature of disasters. There are no really good novels written about disasters with the possible exception of Brunner. (I am surprised there was no mention of Ballard.) When the literature shifted to man-made disasters in the 1950s, it became harder to do a dramatic story about responses to the disaster. With billions of people participating in the cause of the disaster you cannot do a good story about the man who saves the world by recycling.

Cramer expressed the opinion that in the last hundred years we have started living longer but, ironically, in more fear. It may actually be more tragic to be aware of so many threats, most of which are held at bay, and finally to be gotten by one, than simply to remain unaware of them and "to be squashed like a bug." She also feels that in some ways the apocalyptic story has to be stylistically similar to the utopian story. While they are basically opposite in their implications, one positive, one negative, they really are similar in that each must be told by someone actually in the society experiencing the fate of that society.

From the audience Hartwell suggested that we really have a need to feel that society will get either much better or much worse. He has gotten complaints for teaching and recommending 3 3 4 by Thomas Disch. It describes a future society neither much better nor much worse than our own.

The apocalyptic story is one in which the proceedings cannot be described objectively, Cramer suggested. In a real apocalypse there is no way for the main character to remain detached. Coville added that readers prefer that the narrator not remain detached anyway. Readers will want to know how things looked and felt during the Apocalypse. People want to see the effect on the individual. After the San

Francisco quake, the first thing people wanted to know was what was being in the quake like. Someone in the audience said actually people first wanted to know how many were killed. After that, however, they wanted first-hand descriptions of the experience and pictures so they could better imagine it.

Finally, Morrow discussed the emotional impact of the apocalyptic novel. Real despair, he said, is in seeing no choices. For this reason he does not like A C a n t i c l e f o r L e i b o w i t z which he thinks "does not have the pain."

[to be continued]