



travel is a reality, or Callahan's opens, he won't be.) But, the basic plot devices put this short story clearly in the "first contact" subgenre of science fiction. This story illuminates the basic philosophical questions inherent in "first contact" stories. Voltaire, like many SF writers since, uses the foil of an alien

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perception to reveal truth about our own everyday reality.

And, per Evelyn's request, the title is pronounced: MICRO (meaning small) as in MICROcomputer, MEGA (meaning large) as in MEGAdose, S (signifying a plural) as in networkS. [-lfl]

[But where is the accent? -ecl]

2. Let me bounce a sort of speculative idea off of you, just something I have been giving some thought to. Imagine a society that lives in isolation and numbers its individuals in the low hundreds. Generally there is little government. The society is not officially unified under a single leader, though there are a few stronger members and they tend to have followings. There are alliances. There are also antagonisms and there are some rules that cover them. Generally if an individual breaks the rules, other individuals will voice their unhappiness. There may be fights for a while with other individuals taking sides, or even participating in the fighting.

This description fits tribes of humans some ten or twenty thousand years ago. But that was not what I was describing. What I was describing was pretty much the state of the world today with the individual unit being the country. There is a general principle, it seems to me, that in a society the larger the unit you consider the individual, the more primitive the behavior. If you consider the world as an individual unit, it has a very primitive social behavior. It is sort of like a primitive animal that is just barely showing interest to see if there are others of its kind around anywhere. As a world we are doing a little of that sort of poking our heads up and doing a little preliminary looking around to see if there are other civilizations out there, but we are not doing much looking.

We have a considerably more advanced society if our individual unit is the human. We have fixed laws to govern ourselves; we set up police forces to help limit strife. We have programs to help take care of the more needy humans. But each human is an aggregate of millions of cells and their social structure makes our social structure as humans look primitive. Each cell has its job to do and with apparently no consciousness it performs its job. There is a police force to protect against hostile invaders. This includes white blood cells and other cells in the immune system. In general there is very little in the of political questions in the body politic. Cancer happens when something goes wrong and a set of cells starts acting against the best interest of the whole, but that sort of thing is generally uncommon. There are natural defenses against it and most of the time there is no disagreement noticeable amongst cells. Notice that taken as a whole the cells have human intelligence while taken individually each seems to have just enough intelligence to do its job. This seems to parallel the

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situation that nations as a whole seem to have an intelligence and a will that seems to transcend individual members of the nation.

If all this is true, then the most highly evolved societies of animals would parallel the society of cells in a single animal. And, in fact, some animals do have societies that do just that. Bees, ants, and termites live in societies of almost perfect cooperation with division of labor and each individual knowing exactly his/her responsibility. From our point of view this intuitively seems like a very unpleasant sort of society, in spite of the fact that it is a society that operates like a well-oiled machine where ours does not.

Now, I am not advocating actually moving toward such a highly regimented society. I do not think that we would be ready as yet for that. Every attempt to institute a government along those lines has and probably will for some time continue to meet with failure. That is because the individual will not voluntarily lay down self-interest for the good of the whole the way a bee will. But at some point in bee society evolution bees started identifying their success with the success of the hive.

In some sense I consider biological evolution to be a random walk, but I am not so sure about socio-political evolution. I could well believe that the social structure of the aggregate imitates a primitive precursor of the social structure of the individual. Turning that around, you could say that the social structure of the individual is advanced beyond that of the aggregate. Cells have more evolved societies than do humans, but theirs is the direction we are moving in.

Mark Leeper  
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...mtgzx!leeper

New opinions are always suspected, and usually opposed, without any other reason but because they are not already common.

-- John Locke

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## GOODFELLAS

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: A very realistic view of organized crime follows the life of a minor organized crime figure from 1955 to almost the present. The structure is autobiographical at some expense to the dramatic impact.  
Rating: +2 (-4 to +4)

Back in the 1930s Warner Brothers made a reputation for themselves making gangster films. That was the heyday of Cagney, Raft, Robinson, and Bogart. But I don't remember them ever making a gangster film as realistic as their current G\_o\_o\_d\_F\_e\_l\_l\_a\_s. First of all, G\_o\_o\_d\_F\_e\_l\_l\_a\_s is "based on a true story." It is, in fact, based on the memoir W\_i\_s\_e\_G\_u\_y by Nicholas Pileggi, who co-wrote the screenplay with the film's director, Martin Scorsese. And the film is structured like a memoir. It is long for a film (146 minutes) and is mostly episodic, with the episodes being somewhat related. Dramatically it is not structured like S\_c\_a\_r\_f\_a\_c\_e with a beginning, a middle, and a satisfying ending. Instead, it is structured like a documentary, but for one puzzling exception. It starts during an incident in 1970, then in a flashback, as if reminiscing at that point, tells of Henry Hill's career in crime since 1955, returns to the 1970 incident and continues the story, still in recollection style, until about 1980. What makes it even more puzzling is that the 1970 incident, while moderately important, is not a pivotal point in the story.

This is the story of Henry Hill (played by Ray Liotta), a gangster of Italian-Irish descent. Hill is part of a small group of crooks and killers that is sort of a satellite of the Mafia. Only those of pure Italian descent may actually be part of the Mafia. Hill started at age 13 parking cars and running errands for a local gangster. He loves the work and the respect and feat it brings him from the neighborhood. From there one thing leads to another as he hijacks trucks and steals shipments at nearby Idlewild/Kennedy Airport. Eventually he is involved in a six million dollar theft, in murder, and in cocaine. What looks like an enjoyable life early on gets more and more serious and nightmarish. We see life in organized crime and in the social world surrounding crime. There is loving attention paid to Italian food through most of the film. Scorsese has the texture of the criminal very believably presented.

It is clear that life gets more serious for Hill as time progresses, but Liotta's looks change very little in the course of the film. His face is not very expressive, and we have a hard time knowing how he feels at times. Jimmy Conway (played by Robert DeNiro) is more expressive and does seem to change as time goes by. It is unfortunate that DeNiro accepts top billing, since he certainly had less than half

the screen time that Liotta has. DeNiro and Paul Sorvino (as Pully Cicero) play Hill's two bosses and mentors in crime. Rounding out the topliners are Joe Pesci as the volatile gangster Tommy DeVito. His performance is likely to be the one best remembered from the film.

One comes out of G\_o\_o\_d\_F\_e\_l\_l\_a\_s not feeling greatly entertained but with the feeling that you have seen an authentic view of modern crime. I rate it +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

ConFiction 1990  
Con report by Evelyn C. Leeper  
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(Part 1)

ConFiction, the 1990 World Science Fiction Convention was held August 24 through August 28 in The Hague, The Netherlands. The attendance was approximately 3000 (including day members). More notable than the total attendance was the national distribution--this was as close to a true Worldcon as we've gotten. As far as I could tell, every European country the size of Luxembourg or larger was represented except for Greece, Turkey, Albania, and Portugal. This includes all the "Eastern Bloc" countries, who had dozens of representatives--a busload arrived from Czechoslovakia, for example. There were also members from Israel and Malaysia. The newsletter cited the following statistics as of Sunday: 709 Britons, 556 United Statesians, 360 Dutch, 160 West Germans and 40 East Germans (this is the last con making this distinction!), 92 Finns, 42 Poles, 10 Czechs, 8 Yugoslavs, 5 Russians, 3 Bulgarians, 2 Tasmanians, 2 Hungarians, 2 Israelis, 2 Malays, 1 Rumanian, and an unspecified number of other nationalities (Australia, Japan, and European countries not named above all had sizable contingents). This made the convention more interesting as one could get many perspectives on science fiction (and life) from the multi-national membership.

Facilities



The convention was in the Congressgebouw (Congress Centre) in The Hague. The closest hotel, the Bel Air, was about a ten-minute walk away and was used for some of the parties. The attendees were spread over many hotels. Ours (the Flora Beach) was about a mile away; a tram ran from a stop about ten-minutes' walk from the Congress Centre to its front door, but you had to allow at least 45 minutes for a round-trip, making it tough to drop back to your room to pick stuff up.

There were few restaurants within walking distance of the Congress Centre, and none that were open for dinner. Near our hotel were dozens, but they weren't serving dinner past about 9 PM, making the scheduling tricky. Luckily the Centre restaurant was not unreasonably priced (as these places go) and there was a cafeteria-style food service as well that was open throughout the day, including a "Fan Special" for 9.95 Dfl. (that's 9.95 guilders, or about \$6).

Because of the layout of the Centre, the Dealers' Room and the Art Show had to keep the same hours, making the Art Show less accessible than at other conventions. The auditorium used for the major events was very comfortable and afforded everyone a clear, if occasionally somewhat distant, view.

### Registration

Registration opened the day we arrived, but we spent our time doing tourist things (a separate log of our vacation is available on request). We registered on Thursday at about noon. This was a f t e r we had discovered (by looking at Kate's program) that Mark was now a program participant, so we went to the Program Participants' Registration Desk. Our badges were not there, so they sent someone to get them from regular registration. Our schedules, etc., were also not there; we had to go to the Green Room for those. They did have the Program Participant ribbons, but not the Hugo Nominee ribbons.

The Green Room had the schedules (the stick-on labels with them arrived later), but it took a lot of checking around to find the Hugo Nominee ribbons and pins. I discovered that I was on, not the one panel I had been told about, but f o u r panels, and scheduled to do a reading! I got the latter canceled, however. (I did find in my mailbox when I

got back home a complete schedule, but obviously the schedule for mailing them failed to take into account that many United States fans would be leaving a week or two before the convention to do some touring in Europe first.)

The Pocket Program was extremely confusing--there were \_ n\_ o program item descriptions. So, for example, I found myself on a panel called "Anthropomorphics: From Bogeyman to Puppetmaster" with no idea what it was about. But that was okay--the moderator was in the dark as well! The Pocket Program was also divided into two sections, one for primary track and one for secondary track items, but within the sections there had been no attempt to have the items at the same time line up horizontally (the rooms formed the columns). So to figure out what was happened at any given time was extremely difficult. By Saturday, they realized this and starting issuing one-sheet block schedules for each day, and these helped a lot. (Of course, for these they listed participants by last name only--luckily Mark and I had it sorted out ahead of time who was doing what.) There was a map of the Centre, with one or two rooms labeled with different names than in the program guide, but in general reasonably well done. There was no index by participants. (At the gripe session, the committee said that they had lost their programming database two weeks before the convention and that was the cause of many of the problems. I'm not sure I see how.) And there were no name cards for the participants to set on the table in front of themselves, leaving the audience to peer myopically at name tags instead.

The convention souvenir book was a soft-cover 152-page book, which managed to misspell one of the Guests of Honour's names on the first page. It had all the usual bibliographies, stories, lists, and articles (including one on the Gaylactic Network, which given the Netherlands' history of tolerance is not at all surprising).

The usual supply of freebies (there is usually a book or two available) was not there, but that is probably due to transportation costs. Later on we did see copies of some European magazines being

given away. The badges were not as readable as those from recent Worldcons--they were done with an old ribbon or something.

Dealers' Room

The Dealers' Room (a.k.a., the Hucksters' Room) was small, not surprising given the location--most dealers would have had to pay a large transportation cost. Some dealers did a lot of mail-order business--we bought a couple of T-shirts from a United States dealer who had some there but gave a discount if you ordered them to be shipped direct to you. There were a few British dealers, a German dealer with an enormous stock, and an assortment of Dutch, French, and others. As usual, books probably represented less than half of the room and there were used book dealers, but no antiquarian-type book dealers that I recall, and of course, new book dealers. I expected to find nothing on my want list, but I did find one Sturgeon that Kate was looking for and saw another British edition of a new book I wanted, but given its size, decided to hold off until I saw it in the United States.

The one unusual aspect this year was the number of currencies making the rounds in the Dealers' Room--Dutch guilders, British pounds, German marks, United States dollars, and who knows what else. There was much discussion in the daily newsletter about the conversion rates charged by the dealers for British merchandise--the general rate seemed to be 4 Dfl to the pound, though the bank rate was 3.37, and this generated some ill-feeling. Actually, the fact was the dealers didn't want people to pay in guilders, because then they would have to convert them to pounds and that would cost them. The newsletter suggested that Dutch fans buy pounds from British fans who wanted to buy guilders and both parties would benefit.

The VAT (value-added tax--something like sales tax) also drove people crazy. The VAT on most things was 6%, but on music-related items, it was 18.5%. Since the prices quoted always included the VAT, all that happened was people couldn't figure out why filksong cassettes were so expensive....

### Art Show

I got to the Art Show twice (once in advance of its real opening as a program participant, and once during the convention). It was small, not surprisingly, but it did have a nice assortment of artwork--not the same stuff one sees over and over at conventions in the United States. For example, Juraj Maxon from Czechoslovakia displayed some extremely elaborate pen-and-ink works ("Eskulap" was particularly notable) and Lies Jonkers from the Netherlands had some beautiful alien landscapes (including "Kakuheiki," my favorite). The three-dimensional category suffered somewhat, with a much smaller percentage of the art show than usual. Prices were high and many items not for sale, but others were affordable. Of course transporting them was impossible, so I guess you can't win. The room was big enough that it was not at all crowded and

viewing the pieces was not the major effort it sometimes is in fuller shows.

Con Suite

There was no traditional con suite, but the fast food area had tables where people could gather, and throughout the Centre were other gathering places. There was a fan lounge, but it was relatively inaccessible and sometimes used for programming. The exhibits (History of World Bidding, SF Around the World) were in half of the Art Show Hall. The limited space and lack of display cases resulted in the omission of the "History of Worldcon" exhibit which had been scheduled to travel to every Worldcon for the next few years. The Message Board was conveniently located near the main staircase and food areas.

Programming

Given that it's impossible to see everything at a Worldcon, I will cover just the programming I attended. (For a comparison, the program book lists 337 program items as compared to 833 at Noreascon 3, not counting films or autograph sessions.)

Opening Ceremonies  
Thursday, 2 PM

These were well-attended, more than at other conventions. Classical music was played as a platform rose from below the stage revealing the Guests of Honour (Joe Haldeman, Wolfgang Jeschke, Harry Harrison, Andrew Porter, and Chelsea Quinn Yarbro). The Dutch Minister of Cultural Affairs gave a speech which was a bit patronizing--she told us that even though science fiction was reading material, there was some good literature in it--and the Guests were introduced.

Panel: G G G Gu u u ue e e es s s st t t to o o of f f f

H H H Ho o o on n n no o o ou u u ur r r r- - - - -

H H H Ho o o on n n no o o ou u u ur r r r ro o o or r r r

H H H Ha a a ar r r ra a a as s s ss s s sm m m me e e en n n nt t t t? ? ?

Thursday, 4 PM

Norman Spinrad (USA) (mod), Poul Anderson (USA),  
Algis Budrys (USA), Robert Silverberg (USA)

The room for this was packed--not surprising if one considers that the panelists are all distinguished enough to have been Guests of Honour at conventions. We arrived late and Spinrad was in the middle of describing traveling to the Metz Science Fiction Film Festival, which involved a fourteen-hour flight through Keflavik, Iceland. At one point

he had to do a television interview in French, which they subtitled--in French!

The panelists drifted into SCA (Society of Creative Anachronism) stories of people fighting in jousts, including making sure everyone knew that Harlan Ellison was defeated in a joust by Paul Zimmer, who was then defeated by Fritz Leiber. They reminisced about the Stardust Hotel, used for one Westercon, in which the entire staff had just been

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told they were being let go, and which was the hooker headquarters besides.

Silverberg related how when he was one of the Guests of Honour at Heicon, he arrived at the banquet late with one of the other Guests of Honour, only to discover that no one had reserved any seats for them and they had to sit on chairs back in one corner. Another story related how at one convention the Guest of Honour was accidentally presented with the hotel bill for the entire convention.

At this point, one of the audience members, deciding that the harassment part of the panel title was being overlooked, asked Budrys, "Is the function of a writer to communicate?" Upon being answered in the affirmative, he then asked, "Why are the articles in F&S F so hard to read?" Budrys responded, "Maybe the problem lies with you." Silverberg followed this by a long and very refined description of a "Budrys review," which he says frequently starts as praise and gradually drifts into a total hatchet job on the work in question. Eventually the audience harasser was hooted down and left.

When I asked if anyone cared to comment on the Ellison article in A s i m o v ' s (about fans mistreating pros), Silverberg did relate that one time a fan asked him to autograph D y i n g I n s i d e (a book about telepathy) and that as he was doing so the fan said, "I didn't realize you were one of us too." Silverberg said he should have replied, "Well, if you were you'd realize I'm not." Spinrad added his stories about being approached by neo-Nazi fans of his I r o n D r e a m, which he mentioned the American Nazi Party has on its recommended reading list "because of the happy ending." Spinrad also said that he once had two fans volunteer to be his slaves. That was the good part, he said; the bad part was that they were totally unsuitable for the position.

Silverberg says that he occasionally gets requests to be Guest of Honour at a convention which he does not want to attend, and replies, "My schedule won't permit it." This works most of the time, but sometimes the convention persists year after year and even asks what year he would be available, at which point he must reply something like, "I'm sorry, but I will never attend another convention in Upper Moosejaw as long as I live."

Budrys once took a Greyhound bus to a convention and ended up having to change the tire on it because the driver didn't know how.

On the whole, the panelists said they had extremely positive reactions to being Guests of Honour and had no funny stories about happy incidents. When I asked what the   b  e  s  t thing that ever happened to them as Guests of Honour was, Budrys said he was once given the original cover art for his novel   W  h  o?, Anderson said he was given a case of Heineken, Spinrad said he was given a bottle of Scotch for Harlan Ellison which he didn't deliver, and Silverberg said he met his wife.

Panel: B B B BN N N NF F F Fs s s sH H H Ha a a av v v ve e e e  
T T T Th h h he e e ei i i ir r r rS S S Sa a a ay y y y  
Thursday, 7 PM

Leo Kindt (The Netherlands) (mod), Justin Ackroyd (Australia),  
Waldemar Kummer (West Germany), Mark Leeper (USA), Bruce Pelz (USA)

This room was considerably less crowded than the last, perhaps because there was no explanation in the program book of what "BNF" stood for (big-name fan). The panel mostly discussed what constituted a BNF; Mark claimed he was not one, but it seems to me if other people say you are a BNF, their vote outweighs yours. Though initially BNF-dom was geographic in nature (a BNF in California might be totally unknown in Texas), I claimed there were now localities other than geographic and cited Usenet as an example: there are people known worldwide, but only to other people with Usenet access. Bruce seemed to like this idea.

About the only other thing the panel established they had in common was that they liked to travel--but since this panel was held in the Netherlands, it is clear this was not a random sample of fans, or even

of BNFs. However, someone suggested that fans like to travel to "see things through different eyes" and that this \_ w\_ a\_ s connected with science fiction, to which I think everyone agreed.

Panel:

A A A An n n nt t t th h h hr r r ro o o op p p po o o om m m mo o o or r r rp  
p p ph h h hi i i ic c c cs s s s: : : :F F F Fr r r ro o o om m m m  
B B B Bo o o og g g ge e e ey y y ym m m ma a a an n n nt t t to o o o  
P P P Pu u u up p p pp p p pe e e et t t tm m m ma a a as s s st t t te e e er r  
r r

Thursday, 8 PM

Jack Chalker (USA) (mod), Judith Hanna (USA),  
F. Gwynplaine MacIntyre (USA), Evelyn Leeper (USA)

This panel was suggested by someone who then didn't come to the convention, so the topic was ill-defined to say the least. We talked mostly about anthropomorphizing non-human life-forms (and inanimate objects) and whether one could write a really alien alien. Someone (Hanna?) claimed that everyone who uses computers a lot anthropomorphizes them--I disputed that and still do. I mentioned that in the United States, though, we do have Mr. Coffee, and that a friend of ours has extended this to Mr. Word Processor and Mr. Microwave. (Why always Mr.?) We also name hurricanes and tropical storms. And, of course, we anthropomorphize our pets mercilessly (is there anything sillier than the little sweaters we make them wear?). Hanna pointed out that most animal rights activists are childless, though audience members said this may be as much a function of childless people having more time to be activists in anything as of childless people anthropomorphizing animals.

Jack Chalker talked about seeing a Betty Boop cartoon in which she puts on a pair of stockings with a hole in the toe, and her big toe grows a face and hands and points to the hole. This, he feels, could really traumatize young children that \_ t\_ h\_ e\_ i\_ r toes might do this. There was also the mention of commercials and advertisements which put faces on food and have them talk to you (e.g., McDonald's ads). There is a fine line between humor and horror--I keep remembering the bit from \_ T\_ h\_ r\_ o\_ u\_ g\_ h\_ t\_ h\_ e\_ L\_ o\_ o\_ k\_ i\_ n\_ g\_ G\_ l\_ a\_ s\_ s when Alice is introduced to the plum pudding

and the leg of mutton.

As far as alien aliens go, one problem seems to be that even when an author does try to write one, the reader is likely to put his or her own (mis)understanding of the aliens' motivations on them. (I confess to doing this in Greg Benford's "Alphas," for example.) One person suggested using plants as characters, but even these are anthropomorphized. The ultimate anthropomorphism might be Arthur Conan Doyle's "When the Earth Screamed," though Olaf Stapledon does quite a bit of it in S t a r M a k e r, N e b u l a M a k e r, and T h e F l a m e s as well.

Alien aliens also make it difficult for the reader to "connect" with the story, so a human main character for them to empathize with is almost a necessity. MacIntyre referred to the "Post-Campbell Shift" to a universe no longer human-dominated (John Campbell was known for his insistence on human domination of the universe in A s t o u n d i n g stories), and cited "The Persistence of Vision" by John Varley as a particularly violent reaction to this.

This led as to a bit of discussion of "human aliens"--for example, the Kikiyu of Resnick's "Kirinyaga" stories, whose outlook is in many ways alien to the average American or British reader. Chalker talked about how Resnick got started writing supermarket tabloids and how when he (Resnick) first went to Africa, he fell in love with it, though I got the impression that Chalker felt Resnick was more in love with an idealized sort of Africa and perhaps not entirely in touch with the realities there. (Then again, I could be confused.)

For some reason I can't recall, someone related the story of Ray Bradbury working on the script for M o b y D i c k for John Huston. Part way through the filming, Huston came to Bradbury and said that he had a telegram from Jack Warner saying that they needed something in the film that viewers could relate to, so could Bradbury please write in a sexy stowaway? Bradbury got practically violent over this and after much argument with Huston, Huston revealed it was all a joke. MacIntyre pointed out that if that had been filming Melville's R e d b u r n there would have been plenty of sex in it--all gay sex, though, which means there was even less likelihood that they would have filmed it in the 1950s. (It wouldn't surprise me if this paragraph causes a great revival of interest in Melville's writings--or at least in R e d b u r n.)

Panel: S S S SF F F FF F F Fi i i il l l lm m m ms s s s  
a a a af f f ft t t te e e er r r rt t t th h h he e e e  
D D D De e e ea a a at t t th h h ho o o of f f fS S S SF F F F  
F F F Fi i i il l l lm m m ms s s s

Thursday, 9:30 PM

Johan-Martjin Flaton (The Netherlands) (mod),  
Cees Groenewegen (The Netherlands)

The two panelists were, I believe, responsible for the ConFiction film program, which was somewhat limited but did include a few hard-to-find items (more on this later). They bemoaned current films' lack of story, characters, and general development that one sees in literature.



Cinema uses science fiction, they said, for the whizzes and bangs. Of

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course, there are some exceptions ( \_ B \_ r \_ o \_ t \_ h \_ e \_ r \_ f \_ r \_ o \_ m \_ A \_ n \_ o \_ t \_ h \_ e \_ r  
\_ P \_ l \_ a \_ n \_ e \_ t \_ , \_ M \_ a \_ n  
\_ F \_ a \_ c \_ i \_ n \_ g \_ S \_ o \_ u \_ t \_ h \_ e \_ a \_ s \_ t \_ , \_ T \_ h \_ e  
\_ N \_ a \_ v \_ i \_ g \_ a \_ t \_ o \_ r ) , but the mere fact that one can list  
them indicates they are noticeable by their rarity. The panelists also  
missed black and white films, which they felt were better in the sense  
that black and white doesn't hide things as well as color.

Unfortunately, this panel could have used either more content or  
more panelists to fill it out; as it was, it seemed a bit thin and  
stretched.

Panel: M M M MT T T TV V V V & & & & C C C CN N N NN N N N  
& & & &  
H H H Ha a a am m m mb b b bu u u ur r r rg g g ge e e er r r rs s s s  
Friday, 12 noon

Karlheinz Steinmuller (East Germany) (mod), Alejo Cuervo (Spain),  
Ellen Datlow (USA), Takumi Shibanu (Japan)

Steinmuller began by pointing out that, in \_ L \_ a \_ s \_ t \_ a \_ n \_ d \_ F \_ i \_ r \_ s \_ t \_ M \_ e \_ n ,  
Olaf

Stapledon wrote about an Americanized world--had we in fact reached that  
point? Rather off the point, it was observed that American science  
fiction was certainly ethnocentric (Stapledon was British, so can't be  
included in this statement). Datlow asked why, if this was the case,  
people in other countries read American science fiction. The example  
was given that \_ P \_ r \_ e \_ n \_ t \_ i \_ c \_ e \_ A \_ l \_ v \_ i \_ n , nominated for a Hugo this year, was about  
\_ U \_ n \_ i \_ t \_ e \_ d \_ S \_ t \_ a \_ t \_ e \_ s history, and it was almost expected that fans all over the  
world would be able to read and understand the references. Yet, as one  
audience member pointed out, this didn't work in reverse: there is a  
Spanish story entitled "The Last Lesson of Cisneros" by Gabriel Bermudez  
and he would be very surprised if any Americans understood any of the  
references. (I observed that, given the state of education in the  
United States, most Americans probably wouldn't understand \_ P \_ r \_ e \_ n \_ t \_ i \_ c \_ e  
\_ A \_ l \_ v \_ i \_ n either.) This led to some comments about cultural illiteracy,  
including one by someone whose initials were E.G. (sorry, my notes seem  
to have failed me here) that "instead of real information we have facts  
about things that did not happen."

Other panelists noted that Americans are finally picking up other cultures to write about. Japanese science fiction was characterized as a black hole, importing a lot, but exporting very little science fiction. (One suspects that translators of Japanese can make far more money translating technical and business-related works.) Interestingly, Shibano pointed out that in Japanimation, cars drive on the right side of the road, even though in Japan they drive on the left! A Swiss audience member pointed out later that a French economist said that the French try to sell what's French, while the Japanese try to sell what's wanted. And culture tends to follow economy, with a delay.

The issue of translation in general generated some discussion. With more people reading English than any other language, more American and British science fiction will be exported than that of other countries because it doesn't need translation. (This, of course, creates a feedback loop--since more English-language books are available, learning English as a second language gives you the greatest

advantage, so yet more people learn it, and so on.) In fact, Cuervo said that in Spain two Japanese stories appeared recently in Spanish, but they were translated from English translations rather than directly from the Japanese! Of course, in some countries, the copyright conventions are not upheld, so Fred Pohl found himself as the "co-author" of "The Wizard Masters of Peng-Shi Angle" ("The Wizards of Pung's Corners") with a Chinese translator he had never heard of, and when he had someone translate a bit of the story back to English, he discovered he didn't recognize that either. The French do comics rather than novels, thereby getting around much of the problem--pictures need no translation. (It has been said that silent movies were universal, and the advent of the talkies was a bad thing in that regard.)

From the audience, F. Gwynplaine MacIntyre expressed the opinion that the multitude of words English has to express similar ideas meant that English lends itself more to literature than other languages. This was, of course, hotly disputed by many people.

In addition to the language barrier, there seem to be geographic barriers. Though Spain shares a common language with most of Latin America (and Puerto Rico), little science fiction is imported from that

area. Even the magical realism for which Latin America is known comes into Spain mostly through the mainstream publishing lines. In general, in fact, science fiction is imported far more than fantasy or horror.

As far as content, there is still a problem. People ask for stories with more Japanese flavor, for example, but then they don't understand them because they haven't the background. An example of this phenomenon that I noted is in the film A G r e a t W a l l. An American couple goes back to visit the husband's sister and brother-in-law in China. There is a scene by their father's grave in which the American couple put their arms around each other's waists, and the Chinese couple looks embarrassed by this. Unless you know that public displays of affection are frowned upon in China, this scene will go right by you. And for the Japanese, it is pointless to ask authors to write with a more American flavor--that's what they get in English all the time! Even William Gibson's much praised use of Japanese culture is only landscape; Shibano finds it interesting, but not at all accurate. On the other hand, Shibano thought that these Japanese influences in cyberpunk were how Japan w o u l d export its culture.

Shibano talked at length about Japanese culture, which he admits was imported from China but changed to suit the Japanese. And this selectivity is still going on: Japan has adopted Western toilets, but not Western bathtubs, because the latter is far more culturally ingrained. Japanese science fiction, he says, developed from 1950s United States science fiction. In 1989, there were 700 science fiction/horror/fantasy books published in Japan, 280 of which were original science fiction, and 180 of which were translations. It is unusual to hear a Japanese credit another country's culture. But Shibano indicates this ethnocentrism is new; up to 100 years ago, Japan

imported culture from elsewhere and didn't feel particularly ethnocentric. Shibano said in fact that he was bothered by the new Japanese imperialism. (Whether this was merely for the benefit of the audience, or really true I cannot judge, of course. Still, it is easy to believe that there are Japanese, especially science fiction fans, who take a more global view.)

There was mention made of the "quota quickies" of the British film industry--films produced to satisfy a requirement that for every N films

imported, M films had to be produced in Britain (I don't know the exact numbers). Steinmuller compared this to an East German law (recently junked, no doubt) that allowed only 40% of the pop music played on the radio to be Western. As he put it, "Our impression as ex-socialists is that this doesn't work."

(Note: This panel reinforced my feeling that multi-national panels are more interesting, but that they also proceed at a slower pace, as people search for the right words.)

(end of Part 1)