

don't know why you would be. You never listened the other times!)
I'm talking about the BIGGEST U.S. GOVERNMENT SCANDAL OF ALL TIMES!
I am talking about O_p_e_r_a_t_i_o_n_D_e_s_e_r_t_S_t_o_n_e_w_a_l_l, the plot to not tell the American people who won the Persian Gulf war until after an election almost two years later, a plot to completely stonewall the

THE MT VOID

Page 2

American people!

Not that the government's story about who won has not been crumbling over time. Little chinks have been falling out of the stonewall. As soon as the war was over and Iraq went back to business as usual, people started asking, where was the big victory? How come we still saw Saddam Hussein grinning like the Chesire cat on CNN. And the answer we got was big victory parades. And of course there is the issue of the Iraqi nuclear program that nobody can stop. And the chemical warfare program. Maybe what we hit really w_e_r_e baby food factories disguised to look like defense plants disguised to look like baby food factories.

Now we hear that all the smart weapons we used really were smart only by America's education standards. If a missile can name two major countries in North America, it's considered smart by high school standards. It was recently revealed that the Patriot Missile had as much effect against SCUD missiles as were shooting date palms at the incoming SCUDs--which in two or three instances we did.

Look in the near future to start hearing leaks about the tragic mistake we made recently because our President confused the Republican Guard with the Republican National Committee. And how much longer can Bush hush up that what we were told were big gas-guzzling limos in D.C. are really tanks of the Iraqi Occupation Forces. Look for confirmation that that really w_a_s Saddam Hussein who was seen buying everything in sight at a McLean, Virginia, shopping mall.

Oh, and remember you read it here first.

2. I apologize for the messed-up table on page 5 of my Boskone con report in the last issue. When I ported the document from the Sun

to the Amdahl, one of the scripts scrambled the macros. [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
MT 3D-441 908-957-5619
...mtgzy!leeper

Wildest dreams **are** the necessary first steps
toward scientific investigation.

-- Charles S. Peirce

BRAIN CHILD by George Turner
William Morrow & Company, 1991, ISBN 0-688-10595-5, \$20.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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A year ago I reviewed A_P_u_r_s_u_i_t_o_f_M_i_r_a_c_l_e_s, a collection of short stories by George Turner. One of the stories was "On the Nursery Floor" and at the time I said it showed the influence of such works as Philip Wylie's G_l_a_d_i_a_t_o_r and Olaf Stapledon's O_d_d_J_o_h_n without adding a lot to them. In B_r_a_i_n_C_h_i_l_d Turner pulls his camera back, as it were, and shows us more of the surroundings of the experiment, and more of the consequences.

B_r_a_i_n_C_h_i_l_d, I should explain, is about a government experiment to enhance intelligence. In this regard it is similar to Robert Charles Wilson's T_h_e_D_i_v_i_d_e, which I recently reviewed, but while Wilson's work is set in present-day Canada (with the experiment having been carried out in the United States), Turner's is set in the Australia of the 2040s, a somewhat grotty, overpopulated, heavily structured and controlled society. Into this world is

thrown, only partially prepared by his eighteen years in a state orphanage, David Chance. Seven years later, he gets a letter from a man claiming to be his father--a man who was one of the twelve children produced as part of an intelligence experiment in 2002. So begins David's quest for the truth about the experiment, the children produced, and the "legacy" they were rumored to have left.

"On the Nursery Floor" consisted of interviews with various people who had contact with the children. B_r_a_i_n_C_h_i_l_d expands these interviews and adds the events surrounding the interviews. The interviews are no longer an end in themselves, but the means to an end (an end, I might add, considerably changed from what is described in "On the Nursery Floor"). As a result, Turner can add to the texture of his society and this, rather than the "supermen" themselves, is where he does best. His society is much the same as the ones he has used in other stories, but these are not all part of some single "Future History." Instead, they form a set of "Possible Histories"--a variety of paths Australia might take. (There seems to be little interaction between Australia and the rest of the world in Turner's stories, reflecting perhaps Australia's biological and historical isolation.) Turner shows how information will become a commodity of great value--and how this will lead to more forms of control. Given Turner's society, the ending of the book is more satisfactory than that of the short story, and perhaps it was seeing the ramifications of his society as he fleshed it out that led Turner to change the resolution.

I recommend B_r_a_i_n_C_h_i_l_d for its combination of societal extrapolation, inquiry into the nature of intelligence, and

scientific mystery. Turner's books are gradually becoming more available in the United States (and a good thing that is), so look for them.

(Note: On page 58, Turner has a character describing his search for support for the intelligence project say: "The group I thought would back me by hitting the public in the entertainment field--and that's where the ratbag opinions were really formed--was the science fiction writers and fan clubs. Not a bit of it! They didn't l_i_k_e science. It was intrusive, obscure, boring, and unimaginative--got

in the way of real creativity! I tell you, Davey, in politics you learn something new and silly every day. It makes you wonder how we ever came out of the caves." Turner may not make any friends with this line, but he's right on the money.)

RAFT by Stephen Baxter
ROC, 1992, ISBN 0-451-45130-9, \$4.99.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
Copyright 1992 Evelyn C. Leeper

Sunday, 10 AM, Boskone, talking to Mark's college roommate: "So what have you read that you liked lately?" "Oh, [some books and] I really liked R_a_f_t by Stephen Baxter."

Sunday, 11 AM, Boskone panel on nominating for the Hugos: "Yes, you over there?" "I recommend R_a_f_t by Stephen Baxter."

Sunday, 11 PM, logging into Usenet, Chuq Von Rospach talks about: "... a fine first novel like R_a_f_t (by Stephen Baxter, ROC. If you're a hard SF junkie, grab it, especially if you liked R_i_n_g_w_o_r_l_d)"

Thursday, 3 PM, chatting with a friend about books, he says: "You know what I really enjoyed recently? R_a_f_t" "... by Stephen Baxter, right?"

By this point, of course, I was convinced that R_a_f_t had not only a perfectly constructed plot, marvelous multi-dimensional characters, and more ideas than Plato, Kant, and Olaf Stapledon combined, but also the cure for AIDS and the Mrs. Fields cookie recipe.

It doesn't have the cookie recipe.

Well, okay, it doesn't have the cure either, and it's not the greatest British novel since D_a_v_i_d_C_o_p_p_e_r_f_i_e_l_d, but it is a very competently done hard science story a la Clarke and Niven (both of whom are quoted on the cover) and Clement and Heinlein (who aren't). The back blurb gives you the premise in its first sentence: "Imagine a universe whose force of gravity is one billion times stronger than today's." (Though clearly that last word should have been "ours," and is this an American billion or a British billion?) Somehow a spaceship from our universe crossed into this one and got stranded many generations ago, and at the time of the story we have three distinct societies: the Raft, the Miners, and the Boneys.

The plot is not all that original. There is a menace. The three groups, each of which hates and/or distrusts the other two, will have to learn to cooperate. Forgotten knowledge will have to be relearned. Our hero, a seventeen-year-old boy, will have many adventures. Odd physical effects in this universe will amaze the reader, and so on.

There are some intriguing ideas, but all have to do with weird physics or biology. As far as sociology, psychology, or philosophy go, no new ideas are put forth. The values are Heinleinian, as are the characters. In fact, I would probably describe R_a_f_t as what we would have gotten had Hal Clement and Robert Heinlein ever collaborated. (The scenes with Rees carrying books of logarithm tables had me practically yelling, "S_t_a_r_m_a_n_J_o_n_e_s!") It also suffers from a section seemingly heavily inspired by George Pal's W_h_e_n_W_o_r_l_d_s_C_o_l_l_i_d_e, which was at times painful to read. A derivation needs to vary from its source or it reads as a stock piece at best, or plagiarism at worst. In this case, it is the former, since the original is far too well known for anyone to think it would be unfamiliar to the readers.

Is this damning with faint praise? I don't think so. Okay, so R_a_f_t won't win the Pulitzer Prize this year. But I think it a not unworthy choice for a Hugo nomination. Even with its flaws--and it is, after all, a first novel--it is far better than most of what I've seen from the past year.

Nebula Nominees (1992)
(Courtesy of Chuq Von Rospach)

NOVEL

Barnes, John, O_r_b_i_t_a_l_R_e_s_o_n_a_n_c_e (Tor)
Bujold, Lois McMaster, B_a_r_r_a_y_a_r (Baen)
Bull, Emma, B_o_n_e_D_a_n_c_e (Ace)
Cadigan, Pat, S_y_n_n_e_r_s (Bantam/Spectra)
Sterling, Bruce and Gibson, Bill, T_h_e_D_i_f_f_e_r_e_n_c_e_E_n_g_i_n_e (Bantam)
Swanwick, Michael, S_t_a_t_i_o_n_s_o_f_t_h_e_T_i_d_e (I_A_S_F_M; Morrow)

NOVELLA

Ash, Paul, "Man Opening A Door" (A_n_a_l_o_g)
Bishop, Michael, "Apartheid, Superstrings and Mordecai Thubana"
(Axolotl, F_u_l_l_S_p_e_c_t_r_u_m_3, Doubleday/Foundation)
Kress, Nancy, "Beggars in Spain" (Axolotl; I_A_S_F_M)
Resnick, Mike, "Bully!" (Axolotl; I_A_S_F_M; Tor)
Rusch, Kristine Kathryn, "The Gallery of His Dreams" (Axolotl;
I_A_S_F_M)
Willis, Connie, "Jack" (I_A_S_F_M)

NOVELETTE

Aldrige, Ray, "Gate of Faces" (_ F & _ S _ F)
Connor, Mike, "Guide Dog" (_ F & _ S _ F)
Fowler, Karen Joy, "Black Glass" (_ F _ u _ l _ l _ S _ p _ e _ c _ t _ r _ u _ m _ 3 ,
Doubleday/Foundation)
Kelly, James Patrick, "Standing in Line with Mr. Jimmy" (_ I _ A _ S _ F _ M)
Lethem, Jonathan, "The Happy Man" (_ I _ A _ S _ F _ M)
Shepard, Lucius and Frazier, Robert, "The All-Consuming" (_ P _ l _ a _ y _ b _ o _ y ;
_ I _ A _ S _ F _ M)
Shwartz, Susan, "Getting Real" (_ N _ e _ w _ e _ r _ Y _ o _ r _ k , Roc)

SHORT STORY

Bisson, Terry, "They're Made Out of Meat" (_ O _ m _ n _ i)
Brennert, Alan, "Ma Qui" (_ F & _ S _ F ; Author's Choice Monthly,
Pulphouse)
Fowler, Karen Joy, "The Dark" (_ F & _ S _ F)
Kessel, John, "Buffalo" (_ F _ i _ r _ e _ s _ o _ f _ t _ h _ e _ P _ a _ s _ t , St. Martin's Press;
F&SF)
Soukup, Martha, "Dog's Life" (_ A _ m _ a _ z _ i _ n _ g)
Stewart, Gregory, "the button, and what you know" (_ A _ m _ a _ z _ i _ n _ g)

MISSISSIPPI MASALA

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: What could have been prosaic
Romeo-and-Juliet material has more interest when the
communities are Indian and black and the woman's
father is an Indian exile from Uganda who dreams of
returning. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4).

The advance publicity made _ M _ i _ s _ s _ i _ s _ s _ i _ p _ p _ i _ M _ a _ s _ a _ l _ a look like
another

Romeo and Juliet story told on the backdrop of a cultural clash.

In a way that us what it is, but it also rises above that to tell

the more interesting story of a man who has lost his country because

of the color of his skin and how he must decide whether he is willing to pay the price to get it back. It is a story of Indian-black racial tensions on two continents in the 1970s and the 1990s.

In 1972 Idi Amin's reign of terror is reaching out to all non-black residents of Uganda. Jay (played by Roshan Seth) is a liberal Indian lawyer practicing in Uganda. After having given too frank an interview to the BBC, Jay is thrown in jail. A friend bribes Jay's way out of prison but, like all non-blacks, Jay is thrown out of Uganda together with his wife and his young daughter Mina. He flees first to England, but finally settles down with an Indian community in Mississippi. There he does little but dream of getting the new Ugandan government to restore his lands. His wife supports the family by running a liquor store in a black neighborhood. Mina (played by Sarita Choudhury), now grown up, becomes romantically involved with a black man, Demetrius (played by Denzel Washington), who runs a carpet cleaning company. There are the predictable repercussions in the two communities.

There are several nice ironies in the resulting conflict. Demetrius believes that the Indians behave too much like the whites. Yet what we see of Demetrius's family shows them living very much the standard white American lifestyle. They look a lot like the All-American family. Joe Seneca, incidentally, gives a stand-out performance as Demetrius's father. It is Mina's family that lives in the squalid Motel Monte Cristo and maintains their traditional customs. It is the Indian Jay who wants to go back to Africa to live, not the blacks. One black does toy with the idea, but it is clear the black family has roots too deeply set in the United States. There are some nice character portraits and vignettes of the Indian community. In one amusing scene we see a motel clerk practicing his bicycle riding and his phone answering at the same time.

Director Mira Nair previously did S_a_l_a_m_B_o_m_b_a_y which was popular with the critics, but this is the more entertaining film. I rate it a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

WAYNE'S WORLD

A film review by Mark R. Leeper
Copyright 1991 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: It never bores, but it bores.
Wayne and Garth have the potential to do some funny
comedy but most of this film just sparks without
igniting. Rating: 0 (-4 to +4).

One of the most standard architectures for a comedy team is the
straight and the wacky. The straight person will generally seem
either just very normal or perhaps romantic. The wacky person is,
well, wacky. Examples are Crosby and Hope, Burns and Allen, Abbott
and Costello, Martin and Lewis, Rowan and Martin, and even Bergen
and McCarthy. Generally the wacky person gets most of the laughs
and the straight person gets top billing just for setting up the
wacky person's jokes. There is more potential when you have two or
more comics playing off each other as you did with the Marx Brothers
or what is to my mind the best of the teams, Laurel and Hardy. So

Mike Myers and Dana Carvey--playing their S a t u r d a y N i g h t

L i v e alter

egos Wayne Campbell and Garth Algar--start with a plus. Both are
comics. There is potential for some really good humor.

Unfortunately, they rarely play off each other for laughs. Either
each does his own thing or they just both do the same thing.

Wayne's main thing is to make a joke or do something clever and then
flash a big open-mouthed grin as if he were standing in front of a
cheering audience. He also negates sentences by adding a belated "
... not." Garth's thing is to act a little befuddled and stupid.

Not the most auspicious starting material, but with enough
personality the team could have potential. Where they go wrong is
that they are just not all that winning, and most of their gags are
familiar and not funny.

Wayne and Garth have a public access television show on cable
television. The show is done on almost no budget from the basement
of the house where Wayne lives with his parents. The idea is that
in spite of the low budget of the cable production, they are
supposed to be the best thing on television. Sadly, their cable
hijinx are not all that funny and leave one wondering what the
attraction is to their cable program. (SPOILER ALERT: They sell out
to commercialism but realize that commercialism is not what they
really want. George Romero did the same basic plot considerably
better in K n i g h t r i d e r s.)

Besides the two main characters, the film features Tia Carrere
as Wayne's singer girlfriend from Hong Kong. Her singing, like
Wayne's program, is just never as good as the script calls for it to
be. Rob Lowe is a sleazy, slimy television promoter who is more
style than substance. One of the better bit parts is Ed O'Neill as

the doughnut shop owner with a darker side.

As in an A i r p l a n e! film, about a quarter of the jokes but, but unlike in an A i r p l a n e! film, the jokes do not come nearly fast enough. At times the film drags. That is particularly bad since the plot is predictable and if you know what is going to happen, you wish it would get it over with. Nearly every funny joke in the film is an allusion to or lampooning the entertainment industry. Most are meta-jokes that poke fun at product placements or actors talking to the camera. There are several film and television allusions. They give the film some chuckles but still too few laughs. W a y n e' s W o r l d is often on the edge of being funny, but rarely crosses that line. Even at 95 minutes the film is often too slow and just not rewarding enough. I give the film a flat 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.

Boskone 29
(Part 2 of 2)
Con report by Evelyn C. Leeper
Copyright 1992 Evelyn C. Leeper

Hugoes for Electronic Fanac?
Saturday, 4 PM
Saul Jaffe (mod), Evelyn Leeper

Originally Teresa Nielsen Hayden was scheduled to be on this panel, but she didn't make it. Probably just as well, because this way we didn't outnumber the audience. Well, actually, there were four people in the audience: Barbara Cormack, George Flynn, Mark Leeper, and Kate Pott.

The discussion centered more around whether electronic fanzines should be eligible for any Hugoes than whether a person could be eligible as a fan writer for what they had written in the electronic media. This is probably because asking the latter question is useless: if someone writes 100,000 words electronically, but has only 100 published in a traditional paper fanzine, s/he is just as eligible as someone whose work all appeared in traditional fanzines. Yet it's obvious that the 100,000-word writer is being judged on the electronic work far more than the non-electronic.

I somehow don't feel like recounting all the old arguments for electronic fanzines. An appeal to environmental consciousness is not likely to sway many minds, but what the hell, I'll throw it in here.

Okay: ground rules. Currently a "professional publication" (zine or other) is one with a press run of over 10,000. A semi-prozine is any "generally available" non-professional publication which fulfills two of

the following conditions: a press run over 1000, accepts paid advertising, pays contributors in other than copies, provides half the support of at least one person, or declares itself a semi-prozine. A fanzine is a "generally available" non-professional publication which is not a semi-prozine.

The major problems seem to be in deciding what "generally available" means and what a "press run" is. I think we agreed that "generally available" did not mean universally available (of course, "we" here is a very small number). For example, a homeless person has no address to which a traditional fanzine could be mailed, yet that does not mean that a traditional fanzine is not "generally available." So the argument that "not everyone has a computer and a modem" doesn't apply; it's rather whether e n o u g h people have them, or access to them, to make an electronic fanzine "generally available." If someone insists on faxing their fanzine, is it "generally available"? After all, there are fax machines for rent in libraries, drug stores, and mail drop stores across the country. If faxing is allowed, then I should point out that ATTMAIL will send electronic mail to a fax number, so that

Boskone 29

February 17, 1992

Page 2

straight-text electronic fanzines are at least as accessible as faxed fanzines. For that matter, if a fanzine publisher refuses to send any copies of his/her fanzine overseas (because of the trouble and expense), does that disqualify it? That would eliminate 95% of the potential audience, yet most people would not rule such a fanzine out as being not "generally available."

As far as press run, it would seem that changing that to "circulation" would make sense, since "circulation" is the commonly-used term these days. Of course, one then has to determine the circulation of a publication. But given that editors of hardcover lines have been nominated for best professional editor when those lines had average press runs/circulations of under 10,000, it seems as if it's only in the fanzine category that the committees have decided to be strict about the 10,000 limit. (It is, of course, ironic that on the one hand, the complaint is that the circulation of electronic fanzines is too high--though most have circulations comparable to paper fanzines--and on the other hand that the fanzines aren't "generally available.")

(As a side note, I would say that the first step is to say that a

professional publication has to have some monetary aspect connected with it. If a science fiction fan won the lottery and started distributing 15,000 copies of his/her fanzine to everyone at every convention s/he went to, would that make it a professional publication?)

Fashioning rules to make things fit where they should isn't easy.

The test cases we proposed were _ A_ n_ a_ l_ o_ g, Baen hardcovers, _ F_ r_ e_ d'_ s
_ F_ a_ n_ z_ i_ n_ e
_ f_ o_ r_ t_ h_ e_ B_ l_ i_ n_ d, _ L_ o_ c_ u_ s, _ 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, Pulphouse
"Author's Choice" series, _ Q_ u_ a_ n_ t_ a, and _ S_ F- _ L_ o_ v_ e_ r_ s
_ D_ i_ g_ e_ s_ t. _ F_ r_ e_ d'_ s _ F_ a_ n_ z_ i_ n_ e
_ f_ o_ r_ t_ h_ e_ B_ l_ i_ n_ d is a fictional (not fiction!) fanzine--what if someone took a traditional fanzine, but recorded it on audio-cassette (or CD) for the blind? Assuming anyone, blind or not, could get it, is this still a fanzine? Even though it requires special equipment to play back? Does it matter if it's cassette or CD? _ Q_ u_ a_ n_ t_ a is an electronic fiction fanzine that comes out quarterly and is transmitted in Postscript* so it must be printed to be read; does this make it a hard-copy fanzine? (By the way, it has a distribution of under 500.)

Anyway, the consensus in categorizing these things was:

	_ A_ n_ a_ l_ o_ g	prozine
	Baen hardcovers	prozine
fanzine	_ F_ r_ e_ d'_ s _ F_ a_ n_ z_ i_ n_ e _ f_ o_ r_ t_ h_ e_ B_ l_ i_ n_ d	
	_ L_ o_ c_ u_ s	prozine
	_ 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	semi-prozine
	Pulphouse "Author's Choice" series	semi-prozine
	_ Q_ u_ a_ n_ t_ a	fanzine
	_ S_ F- _ L_ o_ v_ e_ r_ s _ D_ i_ g_ e_ s_ t	?

* Postscript is a registered trademark of someone.

Since there's no consensus on which category _ S_ F- _ L_ o_ v_ e_ r_ s _ D_ i_ g_ e_ s_ t falls in, I suppose I'll have to nominate both it as a fanzine and Saul as a

professional editor and see what the committee decides. (If you're planning on nominating it, this may be the best approach to make sure it makes _ s _ o _ m _ e category on the ballot.)

After the panel a bunch of us went to the Student Prince for dinner. Leaving the convention at 5 PM rather than 6 meant that we had no trouble getting a table, though it did get crowded later on. Dave ordered the grilled game assortment (bear, buffalo, venison, elk, and lion). Mark suggested that he order a plate of lamb chops as well, so the lion could lie down with the lamb.

After dinner we returned for the play, but the sound system was so bad that anyone who didn't attend the banquet had no chance of hearing the dialogue, so we skipped out after the awards for the parties instead. Yolen, in presenting the Skylark Award, told of her experience when she won it. The Skylark is a very nice piece of crystal, so she set it on the window ledge in her kitchen. Then, as she put it, something unusual in New England happened--the sun came out. The next thing she knew she smelled something burning and, rushing in, discovered that the sunlight through the award had set fire to her coat. So she called up the person in charge of the award to tell him to warn future recipients and closed her phone call by saying, "I am going to put it where the sun doesn't shine." Only later did she realize her choice of words could be misconstrued. In any case, this year they gave a smoke detector with the award.

The parties were not going very strong when we were there (but then, the play was opposite them). I did drop into the Readercon party and buy a supporting membership in Readercon V--even if I can't attend, I like to get the publications. The Niagara bid party was small, but the bid sounded intriguing. It would be nice to get away from the "big-city" syndrome, and although the bid is officially only for the United States side, this might be the closest yet to a two-country convention.

1991: The Year in Review -- Nominating for the Hugos

Sunday, 11 AM

Evelyn Leeper (mod), Don D'Amassa, Janice M. Eisen, Jim Mann

Not surprisingly, this panel turned out to be more a listing of books people liked than a bona fide discussion. Mann started out by recommending Orson Scott Card's _ X _ e _ n _ o _ c _ i _ d _ e and Robert Silverberg's _ F _ a _ c _ e _ o _ f _ t _ h _ e _ W _ a _ t _ e _ r _ s. D'Amassa (who read about five hundred books last year) chose Ian McDonald's _ K _ i _ n _ g _ o _ f _ M _ o _ r _ n _ i _ n _ g, _ Q _ u _ e _ e _ n _ o _ f _ D _ a _ y, and Bradley Denton's _ B _ u _ d _ d _ y _ H _ o _ l _ l _ y _ I _ s _ A _ l _ i _ v _ e & _ W _ e _ l _ l _ o _ n _ G _ a _ n _ y _ m _ e _ d _ e. Eisen suggested Roger McBride Allen's _ R _ i _ n _ g _ o _ f _ C _ h _ a _ r _ o _ n (actually a 1990 book, if you're reading this for ideas for Hugo nominations), Stephen Barnes's _ O _ r _ b _ i _ t _ a _ l _ R _ e _ s _ o _ n _ a _ n _ c _ e (a 1992 book), and C. J. Cherryh's _ H _ e _ a _ v _ y _ T _ i _ m _ e. I mentioned George Alec Effinger's _ T _ h _ e _ E _ x _ i _ l _ e _ K _ i _ s _ s, Robert Charles Wilson's _ A _ B _ r _ i _ d _ g _ e _ o _ f _ Y _ e _ a _ r _ s,

George Turner's B_r_a_i_n_C_h_i_l_d, and (my personal choice for the Hugo) Martin Amis's T_i_m_e'_s_A_r_r_o_w.

Other books named by panelists or audience members included Norman Spinrad's R_u_s_s_i_a_n_S_p_r_i_n_g, Lois McMaster Bujold's B_a_r_r_a_y_a_r, Michael Swanwick's S_t_a_t_i_o_n_s_o_f_t_h_e_T_i_d_e, Stephen Baxter's R_a_f_t (which was also recommended independently by Mark's old college roommate, a co-worker in new Jersey, and Chuq von Rospach).

As far as short fiction went, we decided to lump all lengths together rather than try to figure out exactly how many words each piece had. Mann liked two stories by Nancy Kress, "Beggars in Spain" and "And Wild for to Hold." D'Amassa seconded the recommendation for "Beggars in Spain" (and I "thirded" it, if that matters), but admitted that he had read very little short fiction (which is how he managed to read five hundred novels, I guess). Eisen liked Karen Fowler's "Black Glass" and Connie Willis's "Jack." I liked Willis's "Miracle" better, but I pretty much like anything Connie Willis writes. (I think her latest--"Even the Queen"--is a scream!) Other mentions included George R. R. Martin's "Doors" and J. Michael Straczynski's "Babylon 5."

As far as anthologies went, A_l_t_e_r_n_a_t_e_P_r_e_s_i_d_e_n_t_s was mentioned by a couple of people as being possibly the year's best anthology--though of course it's actually a 1992 book. (And contrary to what some people have said, they a_r_e looking into marketing it in other countries, at least according to D'Amassa.)

Towards the end of the hour, someone asked how valuable a Hugo was as a way to judge a book, and how it compared to the Nebula. There was some disagreement, but the general feeling was that you wouldn't go far wrong buying a book that had won either of them.

The panel adjourned with a mad dash by everyone to the dealers room (conveniently located next door--intentional or just good luck?) to buy all the recommended books.

Turning Points in History: The Weak Spots Where Fiction Can Slip In
Sunday, 1 PM

Evelyn Leeper (mod), Elisabeth Carey, Michael F. Flynn, Mark Keller

This seems to have been the OAHP (Obligatory Alternate History Panel), the "Meeting of the Society for the Aesthetic Rearrangement of History" notwithstanding. Keller said that Readercon is planning a panel item on "What's My Timeline?" where the panelists are given some information about an alternate world and have twenty questions to figure what the turning point is. I pointed out that they had been planning this event since Readercon I and this year was Readercon V, so I wasn't holding my breath waiting for it.

We agreed that turning points should be as close to p o i n t s as possible: the North losing the Battle of Gettysburg could count as a

Boskone 29

February 17, 1992

Page 5

point, but "the South winning the Civil War" was far too vague and non-specific.

Were there over-used turning points? Certainly. Almost any turning point having to do with the Civil War and World War II could qualify, although here admittedly I am allowing the same vagueness I ruled out earlier. It's possible that someone could come up with a new turning point for World War II, but if the result were an alternate history just like all the others in which the Axis wins, what's the point (you'll pardon the pun)? On the other hand, turning points for the Revolutionary War seemed under-used (though my chronological list shows at least a half dozen).

One suggestion put forward was, "What if the Black Plague were even more virulent?" followed by, "What if it were less virulent?" This naturally resulted in a suggestion for an alternate history volume titled A l t e r n a t e P l a g u e s. (More such suggestions will follow.)

There

was a lot of discussion on what the differences would have been without the Black Plague, with some people claiming that our higher technology would have arisen anyway, and others claiming it was the decreased labor pool that caused technology to develop. Do social structures make technology, or does technology make social structures? The truth is probably some of both: read James Burke's C o n n e c t i o n s.

The Spanish conquest of Mexico was suggested as a turning point, since Cortez had only four hundred Spaniards against the Aztecs. Ah, but a panelist noted that Cortez also had 15,000 Indians, a fact frequently overlooked by the history books. The Aztecs were n o t popular with the surrounding tribes.

What about a Norse North America? There have been a few such stories: John Maddox Roberts's K i n g o f t h e W o o d, John Christopher's N e w F o u n d L a n d, Neal Barrett's T h e L e a v e s o f T i m e, and Juanita Coulson's "Unscheduled Flight." On the other hand (or coast, at any rate), the Chinese had been great explorers, and had apparently reached the California coast in the 14th Century. What if they had stayed and settled? (These could very well show up in Benford and Greenberg's W h a t M i g h t H a v e B e e n 4: A l t e r n a t e A m e r i c a s, due out in October.) There have been a couple of stories by Joe R. Lansdale which assume Japanese settlement of North America rather than Chinese: "Letter from the South Two Moons West of Nacogdoches" and "Trains Not Taken."

How about a history without a Mongol invasion of Europe? (Is this a "turning point"? It depends how it's written, I suppose.) No one could think of any such stories, but I don't doubt there is at least one somewhere.

Keller said that while several works used the {non-}extinction of dinosaurs as the turning point, none seemed to go back to the dying-off of all the phyla discussed in Stephen Jay Gould's W o n d e r f u l L i f e (a book I h i g h l y recommend).

Martin Luther started the P r o t e s t a n t Reformation, but attempts to reform the Church were already under way. What if Luther were more flexible? (Kingsley Amis has Luther elected Pope in T h e A l t e r a t i o n, but doesn't seem to show a lot of Church reform.) Go further back. What if Paul of Tarsus hadn't set out to convert the Greeks, or had otherwise changed his plans? Well, there was one piece on this idea which appeared in C h r i s t i a n C e n t u r y about twenty years ago, but on the whole

no one has looked at one of the most pivotal figures in early Christian history. It seems as though people figure if they're going to muck with that era of Christian history, they might as well just use Jesus as the key figure.

Similarly, there would seem to be a wealth of possibilities in the life of Mohammed, though Salman Rushdie would probably advise treading very carefully here. (Then again, science fiction usually doesn't get the publicity Rushdie did, and there have been at least a couple authors who have done "alternate Mohammed" stories, notably Harry Turtledove.)

Someone observed that a lot of alternate histories have the same events happening as in our world, just sooner or later. That is, something makes the Civil War happen ten years earlier, or delays the fall of the Roman Empire for five hundred years. The result ends up looking a lot like our world, just in a different time period.

Somewhere along the line, someone asked what you get when you cross a deconstructionist with a mafioso. The answer? An offer you can't understand. (This has nothing to do with alternate histories, but I wanted to include it anyway.)

As an aside, why don't more publishers allow/encourage authors to have an afterword to their alternate history stories in which they explain what changed assumptions they used? Robert Silverberg has done this on some of his recent stories and it provides more insight into the story; I'd like to see more of this.

Okay, here's the summary; we're waiting for the following volumes (Benford, Greenberg, Resnick--are you listening?):

- _ A _ l _ t _ e _ r _ n _ a _ t _ e _ P _ l _ a _ g _ u _ e _ s
- _ A _ l _ t _ e _ r _ n _ a _ t _ e _ P _ a _ u _ l _ s
- _ A _ l _ t _ e _ r _ n _ a _ t _ e _ J _ e _ s _ u _ s _ e _ s (unlikely, but I do love the title!)
- _ A _ l _ t _ e _ r _ n _ a _ t _ e _ M _ o _ h _ a _ m _ m _ e _ d _ s
- _ A _ l _ t _ e _ r _ n _ a _ t _ e _ P _ h _ y _ l _ a

The Star Trek Movies: A Look Back

Sunday, 2 PM

Mark R. Leeper (mod), David E. Bara, Arne Starr

The original panel for this consisted of Leeper and Starr, so Leeper (as moderator) invited our friend Dave Bara to join them on the panel. (Since Dave has been a film fan for as long as Mark, he does

have qualifications.) Starr is the ink artist for the DC Comics S_t_a_r
T_r_e_k comics.

Starr (I believe) started out by saying that the odd-numbered S_t_a_r
T_r_e_k films were more introspective, hence less liked. But the panel
then took a more detailed look at the series, film by film. (The
comments below represent their consensus rather than my own opinions.)

The consensus on S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k: T_h_e_M_o_t_i_o_n
P_i_c_t_u_r_e was that though it
had good visuals and a good score, it suffered from flat acting and from
being too long.

S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k_I_I: T_h_e_W_r_a_t_h_o_f_K_h_a_n
had in many ways far more wrong
with it: scientific blunders including a totally illogical Genesis
effect, over-acting, and characters cheating their way out of problems,
but is liked because it provided a "good time" and also because of the
introduction of Saavik as a new and interesting character.

S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k_I_I_I: T_h_e_S_e_a_r_c_h_f_o_r
S_p_o_c_k was a sequel with a larger
context (according to Leeper), rather than just more of the same. On
the other hand, Starr called it S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k_L_i_t_e: it was less filling in
terms of content. He said that this was the film where the crew gets to
swap the Enterprise for Spock because ILM hated the model of the
Enterprise and wanted an excuse to destroy it.

S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k_I_V: T_h_e_V_o_y_a_g_e_H_o_m_e (a.k.a.
"Save the Whales") was,

according to the panelists, not t_o_o badly done. They compared it to
T_i_m_e_A_f_t_e_r_T_i_m_e, the film in which H. G. Wells follows Jack the Ripper
through time to modern-day San Francisco (though in this case the time
travel is in the reverse direction). Seeing the familiar characters in
a modern-day setting provided much of the entertainment value, and it
did have halfway decent humor. The score, however, was awful; Leonard
Rosenman is apparently a friend of Leonard Nimoy's and had always wanted
to do a S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k score. Letting him do one was a big mistake. This is
not to say he's a bad composer, but his style is not S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k's style.

S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k_V: T_h_e_F_i_n_a_l_F_r_o_n_t_i_e_r
was a film almost universally
disliked by most fans, yet Leeper thought if he could remove about eight
scenes (totally less than fifteen minutes), he would have a pretty good
movie in what was left. (The scenes included the rock-climbing scenes
with the boots, the marshmallow scene, the fan dance scene, and the
"bumping into the bulkhead" scene, among others.) Part of the problem
was seen by some to be S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k's tendency to preach: "We agree that
good dental hygiene is important, but I'd hate to see a S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k movie

based on it." Leeper, on the other hand, thought that the basic message was worth doing: "Human rationality is more important than religious faith." Of course, S t a r T r e k V had others problems: the special effects were bad, and the editing was bad. The directing, oddly enough, was n o t as bad as most people seem to think or say, but the story w a s bad, and no one seems to have picked on that very much. As far as the effects go, the feeling was that Paramount shouldn't cut corners--they owe the

Boskone 29

February 17, 1992

Page 8

fans more than that.

And finally, S t a r T r e k V I: T h e U n d i s c o v e r e d C o u n t r y, a.k.a. T h e H u n t f o r R e d O c t o b e r i n S p a c e: As a swan song, it would be good, but if

Paramount makes more films in the series, its standing will fall considerably. For one thing, "the undiscovered country" referred to is d e a t h, not the future, and for as much as everyone runs around quoting Shakespeare, they should know this. Yet after setting all this up--including that final shoot-out where it seems obvious that s o m e o n e from the Enterprise was supposed to die--they have it contrived so that everyone survives. Gack! (That last comment was mine, not the panelists'.)

The panelists also mentioned the new S t a r T r e k spin-off, D e e p S p a c e N i n e, but not enough is known about it yet to make a judgement.

Miscellaneous

Membership seems to have settled in around 900, though this may rise with the return to the Boston area next year.

Panel ideas I suggested last year which remained unused but which I would still like to see or be on include:

- The Influence of Beowulf on Science Fiction
- How to Pick a Reference Book (both literature reference and media reference)

- Fantasy Opera (or Science Fiction Opera) (the former would cover Wagner's "Ring"; the latter would include Blomdahl's A_ n_ i_ a_ r_ a and Todd Mackover's V_ a_ l_ i_ s)

And I would now add to this the suggestion to narrow the focus of the alternate history panel(s); last year's Civil War panel attracted a large enough crowd that this won't hurt the attendance. How about an "alternate Jesuses" panel?

Next year for Boskone 30 (February 19-21, 1993) the Guest of Honor is Joe Haldeman, Artist Guest of honor is Tom Kidd, and Editor Guest of Honor is Beth Meacham.