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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
Club Notice - 09/30/94 -- Vol. 13, No. 14

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are in Middletown 1R-400C
Wednesdays at noon.

_D_A_T_E	_T_O_P_I_C
10/05	Book: MINING THE OORT by Frederik Pohl (Hard SF)
10/26	Book: FRANKENSTEIN (Classics *and* movies tie-ins)
11/16	Book: INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE by Anne Rice (movie tie-ins)

Outside events:
The Science Fiction Association of Bergen County meets on the second Saturday of every month in Upper Saddle River; call 201-933-2724 for details. The New Jersey Science Fiction Society meets on the third Saturday of every month in Belleville; call 201-432-5965 for details.

MT Chair: Mark Leeper MT 3D-441 908-957-5619 m.r.leeper@att.com
HO Chair: John Jetzt MT 2G-432 908-957-5087 j.j.jetzt@att.com
HO Co-Librarian: Nick Sauer HO 4F-427 908-949-7076 n.j.sauer@att.com
HO Co-Librarian: Lance Larsen HO 2C-318 908-949-4156 l.f.larsen@att.com
MT Librarian: Mark Leeper MT 3D-441 908-957-5619 m.r.leeper@att.com
Distinguished Heinlein Apologist:
Rob Mitchell MT 2D-536 908-957-6330 r.l.mitchell@att.com
Factotum: Evelyn Leeper MT 1F-337 908-957-2070 e.c.leeper@att.com

1. The next book to be discussed is Frederik Pohl's _M_i_n_i_n_g _t_h_e _O_o_r_t. Evelyn Leeper describes it thusly:

Miners are bringing comets from the Oort Cloud outside Pluto's orbit back to Mars to supply the colony there with water and air. Dekker DeWoe wants to become an Oort miner, so he struggled to go to Earth from Mars to get the training he needed. But there he discovers that the mining may come to a halt ... and that he may

need to examine the most closely held beliefs of himself and of all Martians.

A major point in favor of this book is that it is under three hundred pages long, so even if you start now, you have time to read

it before the discussion.

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2. I was much saddened to hear of the sinking of the ferry out of Tallin, Estonia, that sank off of Finland with 900 aboard. It is particularly meaningful to me since we just went from the port of Tallin to Finland this last May. It was bound for Sweden, but I think for that part of the trip it followed the same course our ferry did. We can picture all the relevant places.

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3. It happened on a Friday evening as I was leaving work here in Middletown. We were leaving, heading toward the Laurel Avenue and just where the two roads come together we passed something in the road that we had to do a double-take on. One often sees wildlife in the road near Middletown but it is usually a rabbit or a woodchuck. Occasionally you see a deer. And once we had to stop our car as ten deer trooped by. So we are used to having to stop the car for wildlife. But this was a first for us. Crossing the road we saw a fairly large tortoise. Well, not large like you see in zoos, but large for in the wild. His shell was maybe six and a half inches long and four and a half inches wide. I did a sort of double-take. I pointed it out to Evelyn, but she had noticed it also. Of course my first thought was that some car might not see him and run him over. Well, that worried me. "We ought to move him out of the road," I said. We stopped the car and Evelyn said, "Do you want to do it or should I?" One thing I will say about Evelyn is that she is not afraid to handle animals. She startled a curator of a wildlife museum once by asking if she could take and hold the animal that the curator was holding up to show the

visitors. The animal was a large tarantula spider with a leg-span of about five inches with its legs in walking position. The curator was even a little squeamish about holding the spider herself and also was not sure she could trust Evelyn and said, "I wish you wouldn't." But there are not many women who feel that comfortable around spiders or turtles. But I felt a certain curiosity about seeing this animal close up so I said I would do it.

A turtle, like most animals in the wild, is much happier not to come in contact with humans and this one went through four different defense strategies in as many seconds. Defense Strategy Number One was to try to just ignore the walking tree that I must have appeared. Most animals in the wild that will work with. However it quickly became obvious to the turtle that the fact I was walking in its direction was no coincidence. I clearly had spotted the turtle and the turtle realized that he figured high in my

current agenda. That realization caused him to shift to Defense Strategy Number Two. This strategy called for him to pull everything inside his shell. It was too late to convince me he was a rock, but at least all of his soft parts would be out of my reach and he figured he might ride out the storm in shelter and I would find nothing I could damage outside. Then I actually reached down and grabbed the shell. Now he really was frightened. This had already become a close encounter. Defense Strategy Number Three had to have been an act of desperation. He felt his shell moving without him contributing to the motion and decided that wherever I wanted him to go he did not want to be. He probably realized he could not get a very firm grasp on the pavement of the road, but he was anxious to do anything he could to avoid the fate he thought I had planned for him, so the arms, legs, and claws that just an instant before were being drawn into the protection of the shell were now extended to make some sort of tenuous grasp on the blacktop. His claws made a whispering scratch on the pavement as they left it behind ... and below.

Turtles do not like altitude. Their anatomy, which does not allow for much fast motion in the two dimensions they can move in, allows for almost no motion in the third. As a result they never have

much opportunity to acquire a taste for being off the ground. Particularly turtles in the wild find being off the ground an unpleasant, if novel, experience. Making the situation even more unpleasant is their total inability to influence their direction and speed of motion when they are off the ground. This particular turtle knew both that he was not in control and that I probably was. He found this a particularly distressing combination because he strongly distrusted my motives. He therefore slipped into Defense Strategy Number Four. This strategy involved convincing me that I had made a disastrous misjudgement in my own strategy and that I had dangerously underrated the defense capacity of the particular animal I had chosen to victimize. His approach was to hiss at me like a creature who could do me great damage if I persisted in my current action. The turtle found that this strategy proved as useless as the first three. No doubt he was beginning to ponder if there might not be a fifth strategy when he suddenly found himself on the ground, in the grass and perhaps he even realized that this was just the patch of ground he was himself in the process of putting himself on had his misadventure not occurred. And he had in fact made it there in much shorter time than he had originally planned. Preparing himself for the next onslaught he saw out of his left eye the figure of the walking tree receding in the distance. His adventure had left him perhaps badly shaken, but not really harmed, and at least five minutes ahead of schedule. I imagine him questioning, if he has a mind enough to question, "So, just what was that all about?"

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4. Bob Pinkus writes:

I've recently read Dusty Sklar's book THE NAZIS & THE OCCULT which prompted me to re-read the Man-Kzin war series. I've noticed some interesting treatments of some of the same themes in both books. Has anyone else come across this? If you have,or are interested enough to read further,I would be interested in your comments. [Robert Pinkus, attmail!bem2a05!rpinkus, 1-800-282-5323 x4779]

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5. QUIZ SHOW (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: _Q_u_i_z _S_h_o_w is an intellectual _E_i_g_h_t _M_e_n _O_u_t. It is an in-depth look at an almost forgotten scandal that made national headlines back in 1958. Once the public realized that TV quiz shows were rigged to promote ratings, they would never look at television in quite the same way again. Robert Redford directs from a terrific, ironic screenplay. Rating: low +3 (-4 to +4)

In 1958 the biggest things on television were the TV quiz shows. They were a national craze of rarely matched proportions. One producer had four highly-rated quiz shows: "Dotto," "Twenty-one," "The $64,000 Question," and "The $64,000 Challenge." Edward Hilgemeier Jr. was a daytime "Dotto" standby contestant who was never actually chosen to appear, but was waiting to appear if he was needed. A woman waiting to appear was chosen and she went on-stage leaving behind a small notebook. Hilgemeier read the notebook and found some odd notes. The woman contestant won that night against a man who was a former winner, but all the answers she gave were in the little notebook. Hilgemeier went to the man she defeated and showed him the notebook. The two then complained to the producers and each was given a bribe to forget about the notebook. But Hilgemeier found out the actual contestant was paid $4000 for his silence, he had gotten only a $1500 bribe. This struck Mr. Hilgemeier as unfair and he no longer felt bound to keep silent. Soon the New York State attorney was involved. Little attention was paid to the story until a second contestant confirmed Hilgemeier's claims. This was a disgruntled former winner on "Twenty-one" named Herbert W. Stempel. He joined Hilgemeier to claim that the game show he was on was also fixed. Hilgemeier was a complete unknown but millions of viewers knew Stempel and now the story was news. The result was a three-year national scandal that would rock the TV industry and the country as well as tarnishing the name of one of the most respected families in American academics.

To tell the story in 130 minutes in QUIZ SHOW, those three years have been somewhat simplified and scoped down to seem like less than one year. But the result is yet another powerfully-scripted and beautifully made film co-produced and directed by Robert Redford. The film is like an _A_l_l _t_h_e _P_r_e_s_i_d_e_n_t'_s _M_e_n or _E_i_g_h_t _M_e_n _O_u_t for the first television generation.

Why was it considered important to control the results on quiz shows? The most commonly heard explanation is a shrug and the comment "This is television." Indeed television was and is treated as if it is a different reality and this scandal and its aftermath helped the industry define just what television is.

When the film opens the sponsor is unhappy that the reigning champion on "Twenty-one" Stempel (played by John Turturo) is a Jew, and one with a Queens accent and bad teeth. The time has come to get a new champion. About this time Charles Van Doren (Ralph Fiennes) is applying to be a "Dotto" contestant. Van Doren comes from a family of well-known scholarly academics. Van Doren has just the WASPy style and background that the show producers Enright and Freedman (David Paymer and Hank Azaria) would like their champion to have. But they need to control him and ask will he play along and take answers? "What would Kant say?" Van Doren muses. "He'd agree!" the producers tell him confidently. Van Doren and Stempel allow themselves to be manipulated into cooperating with the rigging. But when Stempel is first humiliated by having to miss an easy question and then feels he is not being properly rewarded he decides to take action. The story is told by Richard Goodwin (Rob Morrow), an idealistic Harvard grad student in a low-paid job on House Subcommittee on Legislative Oversight who led the investigation. Incidentally, after the uproar the real Goodwin wrote a book about the scandal and now is one of the producers of this film based on the book.

With the possible exception of _T_h_e _S_h_a_w_s_h_a_n_k _R_e_d_e_m_p_t_i_o_n, _Q_u_i_z _S_h_o_w has the best script of any film I have seen this year. Paul Attanasio has written a screenplay full of often very funny ironic humor. It is also packed with contrasts and conflicts. Beyond the obvious contrast of honesty and dishonesty, we have a father-son conflict with Mark Van Doren (played by Paul Scofield) representing the values and honor of the family while Charles at once tries to live up to and rebel from those values. There is the high academic standard that the father hold up for the family and the son who is only a disappointingly very good. There is a conflict between the academic culture of the Van Dorens and the mass culture that television and the quiz shows represent. We see the wealth of the aristocratic Van Dorens and the cheap and disarrayed home of the Stempels. There is a perceived anti-Semitism in the viewing public to which the Jewish game show producers pander in their decision to take Stempel off the show. And there is just a moment of negative reaction at the Van Doren when they hear that their guest, Dick

Goodwin, is from the predominantly Jewish town Brookline. The script also contrasts the slow money world of campus teaching with the fast-money world of television where a college instructor who used to earn under $90 a week but lives a quiet scholarly life can earn thousands in one night at the cost of a life of fame and constant tension. All of these individual conflicts continue at the same time in the script.

As someone who considers _ S_ c_ h_ i_ n_ d_ l_ e_ r'_ s _ L_ i_ s_ t and _ A _ M_ a_ n _ f_ o_ r _ A_ l_ l _ S_ e_ a_ s_ o_ n_ s to be the two best films he has ever seen, seeing Paul Scofield and Ralph Fiennes on the screen together as father and son is a special experience in itself. No character is really the main character of _ Q_ u_ i_ z _ S_ h_ o_ w, but Ralph Fiennes's Charles Van Doren is the character we learn most about. And Fiennes certainly cuts a trimmer and more dashing figure than he did in _ S_ c_ h_ i_ n_ d_ l_ e_ r'_ s _ L_ i_ s_ t. He has not quite mastered an American accent, but here one ascribes his tones to perhaps having been educated abroad. Scofield is very dignified as his father, but it is hard not to see a lot of Thomas More's quick mind and starchy correctness in his Mark Van Doren. John Turturo is adequately abrasive as his course vulgarian from Queens. One of the biggest surprises is David Paymer's slimeball executive. He has usually played simpy nice-guy roles and it is nice to see him in a role into which he can put a little power. Barry Levinson, who directed Redford in _ T_ h_ e _ N_ a_ t_ u_ r_ a_ l, is cast as Dave Garroway, long-time host of the "Today Show." The two men are entirely different types and one wonders why there was such an inappropriate piece of casting. Levinson gives the roles about the same authenticity that Sylvester Stallone could give to playing Ronald Coleman. Martin Scorsese is also present playing a very high executive for Geritol, but at least here nobody knows what a Geritol executive is supposed to look like.

Michael Ballhaus was director of photography and here one of the big mistakes was made. The entire film is shot in a tiresome yellow filter to create some sort of period feel and in addition most scenes seem dominated by the color brown, probably for the same reason. The effect is artificial and irritating, though it might have worked better with a lighter filter.

A few minor quibbles with the script: In a crowded restaurant quiz show producer Dan Enright has a heated discussion with Stempel over arranging for Stempel to lose. It is very difficult to believe Enright would be so indiscrete. Levinson raises his hand in a gesture somewhat like the one that Dave Garroway would use, but Garroway would say "Peace." Levinson merely raises his hand. And frankly I do not remember NBC using the peacock until the 60s, though I could be misremembering.

Still, this is a great script and a very good look at a nearly forgotten, but nontheless influential American scandal. I give it a low +3 on the -4 to +4 scale.

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6. PRINCESS CARABOO (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

> Capsule review: Phoebe Cates stars in a fact-based tale told with an almost storybook style. A mysterious Pacific island Princess who shows up wandering in 1817 England. She soon becomes the subject of fame and controversy. Michael Austin creates a light comedy-drama that is more about a 19th Century England with a thirst for exotic land. Kevin Kline's role may have been pasted into the script, but it is the best in the film. The film is a little on the fluffy side. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4).

1817 in England was during a time of great awakening in England. The recently ended Napoleonic Wars had brought an awareness that there was a lot of world beyond the shores of Britain. Coleridge and Byron wrote about exotic lands and the aristocracy hungered to know more of faraway lands with poetic names. And in the midst of this craze for the foreign and exotic, Princess Caraboo shows up wandering in a field near an English village. The turbanned Caraboo speaks an unknown language, writes in totally unknown pictograms, and has seems to have fashion tastes molded on some Pacific Island or someplace in Asia. She is adopted by the affluent Mrs. Worrall (Wendy Hughes) and her less charitable husband (Jim Broadbent). Little by little the Princess's story

comes out of how she was kidnapped by pirates and managed to escape from them off the coast of England. But nobody is sure if the story is true or a fraud.

Michael Austin's film is not so much about the title character but about the phenomenon and controversy that surrounded her appearance. The mysterious woman's fame soon spreads across England. Some believe her to be a Javanese princess, others believe her just a woman with a vivid imagination. But many of the experts who first doubt her are confounded by the evidence that she is the genuine article.

Phoebe Cates is the Princess who acts like Asian royalty, but Cates herself just does not look Asian enough to be convincing. In an interview at the Montreal Film Festival Michael Austin said that he first cast Phoebe Cates and since her husband Kevin Costner [sic] came along to tend their baby, the director gave him a part in the film also. Actually Kevin Kline really grabs the attention of the audience as Frixos, the Greek dandy who is the Worrall's insolent butler. As an early and overly candid sceptic of Caraboo his role is a comic gem. What was probably a minor or even non-existent role expanded just for his talents becomes the most engaging characterization in the film. Wendy Hughes is a good actress, but this film does not give sufficient depth to her character. Perhaps

it was pushed aside by the Kline role, but she is a little too sweet and understanding, a bit too good to be true. Jim Broadbent has more to do as Mr. Worrall who married into the aristocracy without any touch of nobility. Stephen Rea is Gutch, who narrates the story. As a newspaperman Gutch is romantically attracted to Caraboo but also feels a responsibility to investigate the truth of her story. John Lithgow rounds out the cast as a linguistic expert won over in multiple ways by the princess.

A film with Freddie Francis's camerawork will always be worth seeing. His work goes back at least to _ T_ h_ e _ I_ n_ n_ o_ c_ e_ n_ t_ s and his feel for creating a period atmosphere in films like _ T_ h_ e _ F_ r_ e_ n_ c_ h _ L_ i_ e_ u_ t_ e_ n_ a_ n_ t'_ s _ W_ o_ m_ a_ n is always excellent. Under Austin's direction his images here have more of a storybook feel than usual. But we

do get a look at village life from the fancy manors to the town square with its ale houses and gibbets. The score by Richard Hartley often has majestic moments but is not memorable on first hearing.

The film is a light enjoyable look at an England that rarely is shown in historical films. It is short at 96 minutes, but also sweet. I give it a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

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7. ConAdian 1994 (con report by Evelyn C. Leeper) (part 1 of 6 parts):

ConAdian, the 1994 World Science Fiction Convention, and the 52nd World Science Fiction Convention, was held September 1 through September 5 in Winnipeg, Manitoba. (That's Canada for the geographically-challenged.) The attendance was at one point announced as 4156, but later recalculated as somewhere around 3500. (The higher figure was for people who bought attending memberships, as opposed to people who were actually attending [a.k.a. "warm-body count"].) In any case, it was pretty small for a North American Worldcon. (Last year's attendance in San Francisco was 7642.) It was actually kind of nice to have a small, laid-back Worldcon, though I understand that many people who might have attended were unable to get flights into or out of Winnipeg at a reasonable time and price. (This may explain why this was the largest convention that the Winnipeg Convention Centre had in a long time.)

We had arrived in Canada about a week before the convention, spending the time in Montreal at the Montreal International Film Festival. (If anyone is interested, there is a separate report of that available on request.)

Facilities

The convention center was large enough that the gathering areas never felt crowded. But while some of the rooms were too large for

the audience, others were way too small. The alternate history panel on Thursday night was packed (due to lack of any real competition, it seems); there were probably about 120 people in room with seating for 100, and people said they left without being able even to get near the door, much less get in. This was also true later with such panels as "Designing Diseases" and "Creating an Internally Consistent Religion." On the other hand, at the same time there were much larger rooms standing idle or almost empty.

And let's just say that having filking, comedy skits, or (Ghod help us!) bagpipe players in rooms next to panel items without _ r_ e_ a_ l_ l_ y good sound-proofing is a bad idea.

The Hugo and masquerade facilities were very good. It was stadium seating (banked) rather than ballroom (flat) so unless someone really tall sat in front of you, you had no problem seeing the stage. (At the Hugo ceremonies, the audience may have had a better view of the proceedings than the nominees: we were seated in non-banked seating directly in front of and below the stage.) A large projection screen also helped people to see what was going on. There was no appreciable line for either ceremony; Kate arrived two minutes before the Hugos were scheduled to start and had no problems finding a seat, and we arrived forty-five minutes before the masquerade and got seats in the center section.

The one item I felt was missing was a clock, or better yet, clocks. It would be very helpful to have large clocks strategically placed: in the dealers room and the art show, over the information desk, and in the hallways outside the programming rooms.

The restaurant situation was mixed. There were a lot of restaurants nearby, but nothing very good. Still, this beats places like Orlando, where there were only three or four restaurants you could get to without a car. The food available in the convention centre was reasonably priced, reasonably varied, and available 24 hours a day.

Registration and All That Stuff

Registration was so fast it was over before I knew it. Well, okay, not quite, but the only reason we had to stand in line when we arrived at about 1:30 PM Thursday was that the "L" was slightly to the right of where the actual line was. Everything was pre-bagged to make it even faster. It's true that we had to go to the Green Room for our program participant material, but that was right nearby and also very fast. The speed may have been a function of the light attendance, or maybe it was just better organized.

The badge holders were very large and came only with clips, meaning that it you wanted to attach them to a T-shirt you had to clip them to the collar and then they tended to poke you in the chin. Once again I put in my vote for cons to provide a choice of clips or pins or, even better, a holder that has both.

The newsletters did list program changes and parties, but were frequently late. Friday's 10 AM newsletter came out about 2 PM, but the evening one came out in time for the party list to be of some use. Saturday and Sunday were slightly better, but not by much. Luckily there was a master schedule with the changes to it written on it posted in the central area. The jokezine scooped the main zine on the Hugos, and had other interesting information besides, leading one person to say that they thought the real zine was supposed to be informative and the joke zine funny rather than the other way around.

Program Books

The registration bags included the Souvenir Book (with nine short stories as well as the usual articles, artwork, past Hugo and Worldcon listings, and so on), the "Canadian Speculative Fiction" issue of _ P_ r_ a_ i_ r_ i_ e _ F_ i_ r_ e ("A Canadian Magazine of New Writing"), a restaurant guide, the program guide, and a "Passport to the Universe" for collecting stamps and stickers, listing parties, and generally serving as a pocket-sized book to jot down notes in. The program book included a pocket program of sorts. The center sheets were schedules for each day, with Thursday's innermost, so you could detach one double sheet at a time, and have in addition to the schedule a program grid, a map of the convention centre, a map of Winnipeg, and extra program notations. The program book also had brief descriptions of the program participants and an index of panels by participant.

As before, I had pulled a copy of the schedule off the Net before the convention (and in fact had printed up a customized program for me of what I wanted to see, and gave a copy to Mark so he could find me). This year was slightly better than last year: the Net copy was posted fifty-two hours before we were leaving for the airport instead of last year's thirty-six hours. (Admittedly, we were leaving earlier than many, but there are always a fair number of people who leave early to sight-see, and the schedule is usually fairly firm by a couple of weeks before the convention.)

Green Room

The Green Room was not open before evening panels, which seems to imply that the convention planners had a somewhat different idea of its purpose than I did. If it is to serve as a gathering place for panelists to discuss their topics it is needed in the evenings as well as during the day. The Program Book, however, described it as

a place for panelists to get away from it all, not that there was that much "all" to get away from. Coffee was usually available (there was a brief shortage on Sunday morning--I think they underestimated the effect of Saturday night), and chips, raw veggies, and small cakes throughout. (There were also electrical outlets where I could plug my palmtop in and save battery power. This may become a more common request, and I heard some people talking about providing Internet hookups at future cons!)

Dealers Room

ConAdian was five times the size of Boskone, but the ConAdian Dealers Room (a.k.a., the Hucksters Room) was only about twice as large as the one at Boskone. And the proportion of book dealers as very low, maybe about a quarter of the dealers. Apparently the customs broker who was supposed to help American book dealers get through customs lost his bond and so most American dealers couldn't be bothered going through all the hassle. Still, this doesn't quite explain why there was such a high proportion of armor, jewelry, and other non-book items.

Art Show

I find that I have less and less chance to get into the art show these days, due to my compulsion to attend panels. I did pop in for five minutes to see the Hugo nominees, and Steve Hickman's space stamps look even better in the original, which they managed to borrow back from the United States Postal Service. Every other time I had a free hour, the art show was closed. Because Rosh Hashonah starts at sundown Monday night, many convention-goers were leaving early Monday, so the convention had pick-up on Sunday as well as on Monday.

Programming

ConAdian appeared to be very lightly scheduled--it had only 287 program items (though this count doesn't include events such as the Hugo ceremonies, or films or videos). ConFrancisco had 492 program items; MagiCon had 420, Chicon V 520, ConFiction 337, and Noreascon 3 833 (all not counting films or autograph sessions). ConAdian also had 24 autograph sessions and 24 readings, and 74 (!) filking items. (Previous convention counts probably included their filking tracks.) This convention also scheduled more lightly at dinnertime, because I actually could eat dinner every night without missing something I wanted to see. One reason for the smaller program is of course the smaller attendance.

However, the programming _ p_ r_ o_ c_ e_ s_ s left some people quite unhappy. On the surface, it looked fine. Potential program participants were set a questionnaire asking, among other things, for suggested program items. The second mailing had a list of all the

suggestions and asked participants to check out which they were willing to do. Unfortunately, apparently no culling or combining of similar topics occurred between these two, and the result was that there were 46 items listed dealing under "Gay/Lesbian" (often with very similar subjects) and only 13 under "Television & Films." This did not reflect the final mix at all, but left at least one major media person somewhat irked at what he saw as a shoving aside of media. (This might explain why he media presentations from the studios were less substantial than at other conventions.) And looking at the list, I can say with a fairly high degree of certainty what happened. As the items were suggested, the were numbered sequentially. So the ones I suggested had sequential numbers, followed by the ones Mark suggested. 39 of the 46 gay and lesbian items are sequentially numbered, so I suspect that they were suggested by either one person or two or three people who sent in their forms together. (And they no doubt expected that this long list would be somewhat edited.) They weren't, and the result was that this "track" had more proposed panels than any other track except "Science Fiction"--more that "Space Exploration," more than "Fantasy," more than _ a_ n_ y_ t_ h_ i_ n_ g. While the final program had a

reasonable balance in all tracks, the initial list may have generated some doubts as to the focus of the convention. (I suppose I should make clear that I am not objecting to a reasonable number of items on gay and lesbian issues in science fiction, or feminism in science fiction, or any other topic. But the committee needs to do some initial filtering or the program may appear skewed do to one or two people who suggest a lot in one category.)

Given that it's impossible to see everything at a Worldcon, I will cover just the programming I attended, with a few comments on a couple of other items. (Mark has a separate report on the upcoming movies presentation, available from him or from me.)

Panel: G G G Ge e e en n n nr r r re e e e
C C C Cr r r ro o o os s s ss s s si i i in n n ng g g g
Thursday, 3 PM
Joe Haldeman (mod), Adrienne Foster, Peter J. Heck, Ron Sarti

Description: When is an SF story not an SF story?

At some point one of the panelists said that "genre" was defined as a "category of art distinguished by definite style, form, or content." This is probably useful to keep in mind.

As might have been expected, this spent a lot of time talking about marketing. In fact, there were really only two questions discussed: is there something antithetical between some pairs of genres, and how do you sell a genre-crossing novel?

In regard to the first question, someone cited Paul Di Filippo as having listed the attributes of the various genres. For example, in science fiction there are no gods, humans are not special in the

universe, reason rules, and so on. Fantasy reverses these. Horror is a form of fantasy, but can seem rational, and the special place humans have is a bad one. However, the panelists also noted that these rules are not iron-clad; Arthur C. Clarke in particular has broken them often: "The Star" and "The Nine Billion Names of God" are both science fiction stories with a god or gods. (Well, I might argue that "The Star" is ambiguous. You can certainly

interpret it as there having been a god, or you can attribute the events to pure chance.)

Isaac Asimov also wrote about the difficulties of mixing genres, in particular science fiction and mysteries. The problem there is that in a mystery (at least of the type he was describing), one needs to give the reader enough information to solve the mystery him or herself. This means that the solution can't be based on some new science fictional concept or invention: you can't have the criminal caught because the chair in the room is actually a shape-shifting alien unless you've laid enough groundwork for that.

More time was spent discussing marketing. Foster says she can't sell her Gothic mystery novel because no one knows how to market it. Heck claimed that science fiction romance gets marketed as science fiction, but Foster contradicted him, and from what I've read in _ P_ u_ b_ l_ i_ s_ h_ e_ r_ s _ W_ e_ e_ k_ l_ y Foster is right. Many of the romance publishers are coming out with special lines of time travel and even alternate history romances, but they are marketed as romances.

Heck gave as a possible genre-crossing example setting a "Star Trek" story in the Old West. But he said we need to ask if the story actually adopt Western elements, or simply keeps only science fiction elements in an Old West setting. Most "Star Trek" genre-crossing pieces are what were later called cop-outs. (Another example would be the use of various genre settings for porno novels: they don't actually adopt the elements of the genre they are imitating.) Of course, as was noted, "Every reader reads a different book." On the Net this is usually expressed as "YMMV" ("your mileage may vary").

Haldeman said that in genres in general, details count (since they are often what defines the genre). So if you like science fiction details, you might like police procedural details. Indeed, there is the greatest cross-over to mysteries of any other genre by science fiction readers. As cross-genre works, there are the "Lord D'Arcy" books by Randall Garrett (alternate history fantasy police procedurals). Straight mystery authors popular with science fiction readers include Carl Hiaasen, John D. MacDonald, and the ever-popular Arthur Conan Doyle.

In vampire horror historical fiction, we have Barbara Hambley's _ T_ h_ o_ s_ e _ W_ h_ o _ S_ t_ a_ l_ k _ t_ h_ e _ N_ i_ g_ h_ t, as well as a fair number of Nazi vampire stories.

Our mode of reading may also make a piece seem to be cross-genre, at least in some sense. Anne MacCaffrey's "Pern" books (_ D_ r_ a_ g_ o_ n_ f_ l_ i_ g_ h_ t et al) as science fiction but seems to be read as fantasy. R. A. MacAvoy's _ T_ e_ a _ w_ i_ t_ h _ a _ B_ l_ a_ c_ k _ D_ r_ a_ g_ o_ n is fantasy, but reads more like a science fiction novel. Somone in the audience asked about Stephen King, especially his "Gunslinger" series; Haldeman replied that you can't ignore King but you can't generalize from him either. One of the panelists noted that Dean R. Koontz is another author that is to some extent his own genre, though I might claim that is more a statement about marketing than about the novels themselves. Here again we see the panel veering into the discussion of marketing and away from the discussion of art.

One reason that King and Koontz are their own marketing categories is that people seem to buy books primarily based on author. (This is not very good news for new writers, of course.) Heck cited a survey by Tom Dougherty of Tor Books which showed that the factors in determining book purchases by readers are, in descending order of importance: author, word of mouth, cover material, reviews, and other. (Well, I guess that serves to remind us reviewers what our importance really is.)

Speaking of King, Haldeman thought that King will be read in the future as a recorder of mid-20th Century, much as Dickens is read as a recorder of 19th Century English society.

According to the panelists, one reason that hard science fiction may be less involved in genre-crossing than "softer" versions is that hard science fiction needs more words to do its story properly, so there are fewer left with which to build another genre. This is true of other media as well: Mark Leeper talks about how the original _ H_ i_ g_ h_ l_ a_ n_ d_ e_ r consisted of fantasy, sword-fighting, and rock music. When the American distributors wanted the film shortened, it was the fantasy that got cut.

Another reason one doesn't see hard science fiction crossed with horror or fantasy is that, as was suggested in the initial description, there is something antithetical there. Hard science fiction fans want facts, not ghosts. Or as someone clarified, "It's not that we don't like ghosts, but we want them in fictional universes, not the real one."

One genre that wasn't mentioned until nearly the end of the hour (and so noted by the mentioner) is the mainstream literary novel. In this sense I might say that John Crowley and Jorge Luis Borges

are in this genre and also in fantasy (though not in science fiction per se). Yes, it's true that Borges wrote short stories rather than novels, but I think the person naming the category was just being sloppy, in much the same way people talk about the Hugo for Best Prozine Editor instead of Best Professional Editor (as in

this year's Hugo ceremonies).

I asked about the fragmentation of the market into an ever-increasing number of smaller genres. If genres are defined by how things are filed in Barnes & Noble (for example), then it seems as if a new genre is being created every few months: African-American literature, women's literature, gay and lesbian literature, etc. (One wonders where one files Samuel Delany in all this?) The panelists agreed that there were new genres in this sense, and that it did create problems, although none addressed the issue of readers becoming ever more compartmentalized and narrow in their reading from seeing just a narrow range of books in their section of primary interest.

Haldeman wrapped up by saying that his theory is that there are two ways to entertain people: give them what they expect, or surprise them, and that cross-genre pieces primarily work by doing the latter. (He also plugged his upcoming novel _ 1_ 9_ 6_ 8, a "literary novel with science fiction fans as characters.")

Panel: S S S SF F F F
O O O Or r r ri i i ig g g gi i i in n n ns s s s
Thursday, 4 PM
Bradford Lyau (mod), Arthur Kyle, David Kyle,
Jean-Louis Trudel, Ariane Von Orlow

Description: Are we running the Chicken and the Egg theory again? How did SF begin?

Well, it seems as if to some extent, this question is just a fancy way to get into the old argument of what exactly is science fiction. Lyau claimed that the problem with this topic in particular is that we have a Garden of Eden complex--we want one single source.

At least some of the panelists contended that science fiction as a genre emerged from a background, that of the Scientific Revolution, which also saw the birth of the modern novel and various other art forms. (One assumes this applies mostly to the West; the Japanese novel dates back almost a thousand years.) Arthur Kyle though that arguing too much about where science fiction started might lead us to lose sight of what it is. David Kyle (Arthur's father, in case you were wondering) emphasized that we couldn't have science fiction with a technological background to support it but said that lately "science fiction has been over-shadowed by fantasy; fantasy rules the roost." Part of that technological basis is also the idea of change, as he explained later. In the 19th Century, change became standard. For example, sons could follow some occupation other than that of their fathers. (I might add that evolution as the quintessential embodiment of this idea of change: the earth and all its inhabitants were not created 6000 years ago exactly as they are now, but they _ e_ v_ o_ l_ v_ e_ d to their present state.)

Trudel saw science fiction as "a social phenomenon, an idea, an artform." He pointed out that de Bergerac did a lot of what Swift did--used fiction to disguise the actual targets of his attacks. Both wanted to say things about what was going on around them, but attacking people and ideas straight out was too dangerous, so fiction--especially science fiction or fantasy--provided a safe cover.

Von Orlow (Trudel's wife--this was a very "related" panel) returned to the idea of a technological basis for science fiction, and said that since science as we know it started in the 17th Century, science fiction could go back that far. In addition to the usual progenitors (Cyrano de Bergerac's _ C_ o_ m_ i_ c_ a_ l _ H_ i_ s_ t_ o_ r_ y _ o_ f _ t_ h_ e _ S_ t_ a_ t_ e_ s _ a_ n_ d _ E_ m_ p_ i_ r_ e_ s _ o_ f _ t_ h_ e _ W_ o_ r_ l_ d_ s _ o_ f _ t_ h_ e _ M_ o_ o_ n _ a_ n_ d _ S_ u_ n [1651] and Jonathan Swift's _ G_ u_ l_ l_ i_ v_ e_ r'_ s _ T_ r_ a_ v_ e_ l_ s [1726]), she also mentioned Francis Godwin's _ M_ a_ n _ i_ n _ t_ h_ e _ M_ o_ o_ n_ e (1638). This led Trudel to note that Lucian of Samosata (2nd Century C.E.) was the first author to say explicitly that what he was writing was fiction (even though the title of his work was _ T_ r_ u_ e _ H_ i_ s_ t_ o_ r_ y). And Kepler's demon for

getting to the moon in _ K_ e_ p_ l_ e_ r'_ s _ D_ r_ e_ a_ m (1634) was not all that different from the use of faster-than-light travel today, just couched in the terms of the time.

Some other ideas were discussed. For example science, and hence science fiction, deals with humanity's relationship to knowledge and what we can and can't know. The Western scientific view is much more inclusive about what we can know than, say, that of an Eastern mystic. Does this make science fiction a purely European concept (including of course European-derived countries as well)? The consensus was yes, unless you want to extend science fiction to include myths.

The term "science fiction" was of course invented by Hugo Gernsback. Jules Verne called his works "imaginary voyages": H. G. Wells called his "scientific romances." "Fantasy" might be appropriate, but is not as constraining as "science fiction." In regard to the implied connection of "science" and "science fiction," which is not always there, Lyau said that "science fiction" was a term we were stuck with, much as we have the term "Romantic Era" to describe a period that has little to do with what we think of as romance.

Brief mention at the end of the hour was made of early science fiction in other forms, particularly in music with Delibes's _ C_ o_ p_ p_ e_ l_ i_ a (1870) and Offenbach's _ T_ a_ l_ e_ s _ o_ f _ H_ o_ f_ f_ m_ a_ n (1881).

Recommended (by me) further reading on early science fiction includes the first two chapters of Neil Barron's _ A_ n_ a_ t_ o_ m_ y _ o_ f _ W_ o_ n_ d_ e_ r, Russell Freedman's _ 2_ 0_ 0_ 0 _ Y_ e_ a_ r_ s _ o_ f _ S_ p_ a_ c_ e _ T_ r_ a_ v_ e_ l (a young adult book, but quite comprehensive), Sam Moskowitz's _ S_ c_ i_ e_ n_ c_ e _ F_ i_ c_ t_ i_ o_ n _ b_ y _ G_ a_ s_ l_ i_ g_ h_ t, and Brian Aldiss's _ T_ r_ i_ l_ l_ i_ o_ n _ Y_ e_ a_ r _ S_ p_ r_ e_ e. Aldiss, like

most literary historians (including the panelists, when all is said and done), lists many "noble ancestors" but still says that modern

science fiction began with Mary Shelley's _ F_ r_ a_ n_ k_ e_ n_ s_ t_ e_ i_ n (1818). Mary Shelley also wrote _ T_ h_ e _ L_ a_ s_ t _ M_ a_ n (1826), which Bantam is reprinting in October (probably on the theory that everyone else will be reprinting _ F_ r_ a_ n_ k_ e_ n_ s_ t_ e_ i_ n).

Panel: S S S Sh h h ho o o ou u u ul l l ld d d dS S S SF F F F
H H H Ha a a av v v ve e e eR R R Ri i i iv v v ve e e et t t ts s s s? ? ? ?
Thursday, 5 PM
Ken Meltsner (mod), Maia Cowan, Bart Kemper,
Jonathan V. Post, Allen Steele

Description: Everything in life and beyond has a structure, but must we know the "science" behind every facet of existence?

The panelists started by asking the question, "Has old hard science fiction held up well under our changing knowledge of science?" And their answer was, "Yes and no." Predictable, but not a very informative start.

As elaboration, Steele said that he recently re-read Wilson Tucker's _ Y_ e_ a_ r_ o_ f_ t_ h_ e_ Q_ u_ i_ e_ t_ S_ u_ n, written thirty years ago, in which people are sent to the future, but it was the future of when he wrote the book, so it's our past. Or rather, it's not our past. What holds up in the book, according to Steele, is not the history, but the science: the time machine. On the other hand, Poul Anderson's _ B_ r_ a_ i_ n_ W_ a_ v_ e is dated technology-wise, but the central idea holds up. Post recommended a book on the physics of time travel in science fiction (he thought it was by someone named McVey, but I suspect he was thinking of _ T_ i_ m_ e_ M_ a_ c_ h_ i_ n_ e_ s: _ T_ i_ m_ e _ T_ r_ a_ v_ e_ l _ i_ n _ P_ h_ y_ s_ i_ c_ s, _ M_ e_ t_ a_ p_ h_ y_ s_ i_ c_ s, & _ S_ c_ i_ e_ n_ c_ e _ F_ i_ c_ t_ i_ o_ n by Paul J. Nahin). Post also summed up many people's view on out-dated science in his description of E. E. Smith's works: "Its rivets may have been rusty, but they're real rivets."

Cowan said she was all in favor of science, but she was not enthralled by "fascinating explications of angular momentum." Kemper felt that it was important at least to be accurate to current knowledge, but Cowan felt that even that was not necessarily required. And Steele seemed to agree that this may be an unnecessarily stringent requirement when he suggested that if up-to-date science were so important, books should come with an expiration date on the cover ("Do not read after January 1, 2001"). And Post observed, "If the pace of science continues to accelerate, writers will not be able to keep up, and science fiction will become a branch of history."

Maybe because of this, short-term hard science fiction has largely been replaced by techno-thrillers. (Oddly enough, Tom Clancy, the acknowledged master of this field, says, "I don't think I'm an SF writer, because I don't know that much about science.")

Cowan insisted that science in a story should have a point, which led someone to ask just what was meant by "rivets" anyway. Someone defined rivets as "lots of explanations of science"; someone else said it's when science is one of the characters. Post said that "Melville had wooden rivets," and pretty much everyone agreed that whatever rivets were, Melville had the whaling equivalent.

Both Post and Steele suggested that "rivets" could sometimes be footnotes or, better still, hypertext. But rivets sometimes serve a plot function: use them early to convince your reader you know what you're talking about and it's easier to slip something through later. (This has echoes in what was said on the genre-crossing panel about being careful with the details.) Someone has called this the "Fleming Effect," since Ian Fleming used it in the James Bond novels to establish realism.

If you really like rivets, there are a lot of them out there. Larry Niven's _ R_ i_ n_ g_ w_ o_ r_ l_ d, Arthur C. Clarke's _ N_ e_ m_ e_ s_ i_ s, and just about anything by Hal Clement are full of rivets.

Someone said, "People will forgive a lot if it's a good book," which led Janice Eisen (in the audience) to observe that it's easier to forgive out-dated science that out-dated sociology. The example she gave was the book in which "space housewife meets space husband at door with space martini." Unfortunately, this got everyone off on a tangent about the perceived domination of the field by men, and how it is seen as a male preserve.

When the panel finally got back on track, the panelists were asked for their favorite rivets. Post liked the nine-month voyage to Jupiter in Arthur C. Clarke's _ 2_ 0_ 0_ 1, for which he saw Clarke's calculations in the margin that showed that length of time was right. Cowan liked the attention to biological and sociological rivets in Donald Kingsbury's _ C_ o_ u_ r_ t_ s_ h_ i_ p _ R_ i_ t_ e. Steele liked Jules Verne's _ F_ r_ o_ m _ t_ h_ e _ E_ a_ r_ t_ h _ t_ o _ t_ h_ e _ M_ o_ o_ n, especially the first chapter.

Kemper liked _ S_ t_ a_ r_ s_ h_ i_ p _ T_ r_ o_ o_ p_ e_ r_ s, especially after having been in the paratroopers. (I have a fondness for H. Beam Piper's

"Omnilingual.")

For "unfavorite" (or missing) rivets, Cowan mentioned Michael Kube-McDowell's _E_x_i_l_e which postulated a society in which women held all the property, but men were the ones educated, etc. "How did the women hold onto the property?" she had asked Kube-McDowell. "Magic," was his answer (somewhat facetiously, one supposes). Steele mentioned Dale Brown's _S_i_l_v_e_r_T_o_w_e_r, in which there is a very accurate space station, with no artificial gravity, in which one character picks up, drinks from, and then sets down a cup of coffee.

[To be continued]

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