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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
 Club Notice - 11/04/94 -- Vol. 13, No. 19

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

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

_D_A_T_E _T_O_P_I_C

- 11/05 FRANKENSTEIN (Saturday, 1:30 PM, Hazlet Multiplex)
- 11/12 INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE (Saturday, Hazlet Multiplex)
- 11/16 Book: INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE by Anne Rice (movie tie-ins) (5T-415)
 NOTE ROOM CHANGE
- 11/19 STAR TREK: GENERATIONS (Saturday, Hazlet Multiplex)

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.

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1. Continuing with the get-togethers at the SF films opening over
 the next few weeks. Evelyn and I will be attending the first
 matinee this Saturday (tomorrow) of FRANKENSTEIN at the Hazlet
 Multiplex. Anyone who wants to join us for the movie and possible
 discussion afterwards (the Red Oak Diner, just a little north of
 the theater on the northbound side, corner of Route 35 and Bethany)

is free to do so. Just look for us in the theater itself (where the seats are). (If you don't know what we look like, we can probably provide a description. I will be the handsome bearded fellow in the photographer's vest.)

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The schedule for future films will be:

11/05: FRANKENSTEIN (1:30 PM)

11/12: INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE

11/19: STAR TREK: GENERATIONS

Live long. Prosper. Buy bonds. Remember the Maine. Have a nice day. [-mrl]

2. My friends, it is time to go public. The data is in and it does not look good for the human race. We have to fight back against our common enemy... But do you know who it is that we have to fight? No, you have nearly been conquered and you don't even know who it is that is doing it to you. My friends the evidence is all around you that ASOF is here, but you are blind to what is happening. How can we all have been so blind? There are so many telltale signs that we have been occupied already. They are controlling our minds, our tastes, our choices. How else can you explain things like the popularity of Madonna? Pieces of the puzzle have fallen into place for years. Who knows how long ASOF has been here? But they are here and none of us have seen it until I found out about it. We all have to be something that there isn't a word for yet. We have to be Patriots, but not Patriots for a country but Patriots for a world. My friends, the truth can be told now about ASOF because they are all around and we have to defend our planet from the ASOF. Alien-Satanic Occupation Forces. It started with square dancing, but even square dancing was not a powerful enough form of mind control. It may have been that what defeated the square dancing conspiracy was something as simple as Coca-Cola. People who square dance drink caffeinated beverages and they are made too alert for ASOF to put their hypnotic messages in square dancers minds. Who know what else ASOF tried. My agents

say that the satanic messages and the mind-dulling effect was almost achieved with rock music. Sometimes the messages were forward, sometimes backward. But I think ASOF found out that only those who liked that sort of music were already brain-dead. They had to reach out to the intelligentsia, put them in a hypnotic state and subject them to messages with their plans. It must have been a real problem for ASOF, but God help us they have solved the problem. They are all around us. People whose mind have been taken by those pictures. You know the pictures. They are in magazines. They are on the internet. They are in bookstores. You stare at them and you are hypnotized and ASOF can put anything they want in your mind. 3d pictures. They will look like a whole bunch of speckles on a page. But you stare at them and put your mind in a hypnotic state and you see funny pictures that jump off the page and into the deepest recesses of your mind. And in the little speckles are Satanic messages. In the little dots are alien-mind control commands. My friends we have to be brave. But dammit,

they have conquered us without firing a shot. No, we can't give in to despair. Be brave. Fight ASOF. Don't wear smiley-face buttons or tell people to have a nice day. I think that may be how the contagion is spread. We have to dedicate ourselves to the purity of our solar system and fight all influences from out there. Oh, and have a nice day. [-mrl]

3. STARGATE (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: A haggard adventure tale given a modern sci-fi explanation, building up to entirely too much special effects. What could have been a great adventure film turns into a much less exciting action story. The film has a nice look and a few interesting ideas, but the script could have used more work. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4)

Back in the last century and the early parts of this one there were still many unexplored regions on earth. A kind of fantasy

flourished then that has since nearly died out. This was the "lost race" story, in which in some unexplored place, some last outpost of the ancient civilization still thrives unaware that they are an anachronism. It may be Egyptian or Roman, or perhaps it still has the civilization of the ancient Incas or Atlantis, and is being discovered by modern explorers. The greatest practitioner of these stories was H. Rider Haggard, author of S_h_e. But other names that come to mind are Edgar Rice Burroughs, A. Merritt, and Ian Cameron, who wrote T_h_e_L_o_s_t_O_n_e_s (a.k.a. T_h_e_I_s_l_a_n_d_a_t_t_h_e_T_o_p_o_f_t_h_e_W_o_r_l_d)

as late as 1961. But in the 1990s the real estate that could host such a lost civilization is now almost non-existent and so is the genre. Roland Emmerich, who last directed the terrible U_n_i_v_e_r_s_a_l_S_o_l_d_i_e_r, has resurrected the lost race story with a bit of sci-fi (as opposed to science fiction) hand-waving. Instead of a potsherd pointing the way to a civilization somewhere beyond the Mountains of the Moon in Africa, it is a twenty-foot ring that provides a gateway across the known universe. The ring was a passageway for aliens at the time Ancient Egypt was building pyramids. When they were done with it the Egyptians just sort of packed it away much like the U.S. Government did with the Ark of the Covenant.

As our story opens, it is 1928 and the Stargate is found by one bunch of understandably very confused archaeologists. Sixty-six years later government archaeologists are still trying to figure out what to do with this mysterious object (so they can move on to the Ark of the Covenant, I suppose). Invited to join the team is Dr. Daniel Jackson (played by James Spader), a renegade Egyptologist who wants to prove that Egyptians could not have built the Great Pyramid. He is laughed at as Great Men of Truth have

always been laughed at, going back to the Frederic March D_r._J_e_k_y_l_l_a_n_d_M_r._H_y_d_e. His chance to prove his theories comes from Catherine (Viveca Lindfors--and it is great to see her still acting), a government scientist working on decoding the 1928 artifact. Meanwhile, the project has been given over to the military and is now headed by Col. Jack O'Neal (Kurt Russell). Jackson decodes the last pieces of the puzzle and that is all that is needed to activate a passageway. On the other side is a lot of desert and a lost civilization of Egyptians, slaves to the living

god Ra (played by Jaye Davidson of T_h_e_C_r_y_i_n_g_G_a_m_e).

S_t_a_r_g_a_t_e is yet another beautiful but rather empty film. Production designer Holger Gross and art director Peter Murton have gone a long way to recreate the grandeur of Ancient Egypt. The brassy score by David Arnold is exciting. But the adventure itself is on a juvenile level and certainly not of the caliber of an H. Rider Haggard adventure. Some of what we see seems very poorly thought out. A shaggy desert animal (actually a Clydesdale horse in a fake fur coat) seems altogether unsuited for the desert climate. There is a ludicrous product placement with a chocolate-covered candy bar. Who would want to eat a candy bar that can take riding around in somebody's pocket for hours in a hot desert and still shows no sign of melting? And one wonders if some desert slave who has never seen chocolate--or candy at all--would be so anxious to put in his mouth something that looks so much like a bar of excrement. The recreation of a desert civilization in some ways is very detailed and almost overcomes the atmosphere-breaking sci-fi opening while giving some of the feel of an H. Rider Haggard story. Unfortunately, things build to a special effects extravaganza of a battle and it is just what this film did not need. The innocent feel of the old-fashioned adventures is lost when spears turn out to be missile launchers.

Some of the ideas of this film are really specious. The idea that the Egyptians had to be introduced to the concept of the pyramid at the time of the Great Pyramid does not account for the fact that there were older pyramids in Egypt. The pyramid was invented by Im-ho-tep somewhere around 2650 B.C. in the Third Dynasty. He stacked mastabas of diminishing size for the King Zoser. That step pyramid still stands at Saqqara. Im-ho-tep was one of history's great geniuses, incidentally, a physician and a statesman as well as an architect. The Great Pyramid of Khufu was built at Giza in the Fourth Dynasty, probably more than a hundred years later and many hundreds of years after the mastabas were invented. While pinning down dates is in large part a matter of guesswork, there were pyramids at least a hundred years before Khufu's Great Pyramid and perhaps considerably more.

And as for this idea that it takes six points to pinpoint a location in space, that's another load of duck tires. How many points does it take to determine a location in space? You need

only one. Now if you are talking instead about coordinates, it takes three. But then you need three real numbers. Sectors on a wheel won't give you enough. The geometry made no sense.

Somewhere deep inside this techno-S_h_e is a good adventure film. The problem is that they are not sure if they really want to be a high-tech science fiction film or a more traditional lost civilization film. I would vote for the latter. I rate it a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

4. FAUST (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: Bizarre--to say the least--surrealistic semi-live-action, semi-animated retelling of the story of Faust from avant-garde Czech animator Jan Svankmajer. Much of this film is irritating and off-putting. There are, however, some funny moments and a lot of moments that just make no sense at all. The film is at its most enjoyable when it is the least creative and is just quoting from one of several classical versions of the story: Marlowe, Goethe, Gounod, etc. Rating: high 0 (-4 to +4)

The film starts slowly even for a version of Faust. A very typical man, no Doctor Faustus by any means, comes out of a subway tunnel and is given a leaflet with a mystical symbol and a map. That night there is a strange chicken in his room. It leaves goose droppings on the floor that he cleans up before he makes himself a modest dinner. In the center of his loaf of bread he finds an egg which he cracks open to find empty. As he opens the egg there is thunder in the room and objects move around by themselves. What does all this have to do with telling the Faust story? Not a darn thing that I can figure out. It is some mystical or pseudo-symbolic folderol that Czech animator Jan Svankmajer uses to start this story that he both wrote and directed. It is not at all clear that episodes like the egg scene help us to understand anything about the issues of the story.

Our Everyman, played by Petr Cepek, recovers from the surprise of the night before (or rather does not even notice it or he finds it unremarkable) and follows the map to a theater, where the story of Faust is being put on either as live action or in marionettes. With scenes contributed by the marionettes and by full-size actors, with scenes going on backstage or entirely out of the theater, we piece together bits of the classic story or at least of the Czech revision of the story. For example, our Everyman--Faust, it appears--starts exploring this weird building and finds a back room

with scientific glassware and books. In a retort he finds a clay baby. For no obvious reason our Faust copies a formula from the book and shoves it in the clay baby's mouth. The baby comes to life. But while its body stays the same the head reforms itself into more mature and older versions of the same head--Faust's head we realize--until it turns into a skull. Faust pulls out the paper. After the fact we realize that Faust is supposed to have made a golem in this version, Well, in all versions Faust was supposedly a learned man. Presumably this version has the knowledge to make a golem. Svankmajer is Czech, and particularly in Prague, people are very aware of golem legends. But it is only after the fact that this was supposed to be a scene from the Faust story and not just something obscure like the hollow egg scene.

There are certainly some creative scenes, particularly ones involving the marionettes. Svankmajer was earlier in his career a puppetmaster, and this version relies heavily on puppetry. But this is mostly a version of Faust for the music video generation with a bit of a Monty Python feel and not a whole lot of the original legend left. At no point can Svankmajer's storytelling be said to be coherent. We are left with more of an ego piece than the classic legend deserves. There is nothing wrong with telling a classical story in a new and creative manner, but it is a mistake when the style gets in the way of the storytelling. This needlessly obscure version of the classic Faust gets a high 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.

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

Panel: What Is REALLY Killing the Backlisting of Good Books
Sunday, 12 N
Joseph T. Mayhew (mod), Tom Doherty,
Patrick Nielsen Hayden, Robert Runte

Description: A discussion on the shelf-life of books and how to

keep our favorites front and center in the buyer's mind.

Backlisting (just to make sure everyone knows what this panel is about) is the keeping of books in print, or bringing them back into print, after the short shelf life of the bestseller. (By the way, "bestseller" is now considered its own marketing genre, just like "science fiction" or "mysteries.")

The question was asked as to whether the lack of backlisting was particularly pronounced in the science fiction field, or occurred throughout literature, but no one ever answered it.

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Many people seemed to want to blame the non-bookstore markets for this phenomenon because they carry only the latest books, but Nielsen Hayden said that rather than blame the non-bookstores we should thank them, because they are the source of new readers.

It used to be that demand outstripped supply; this is no longer true, and the sheer glut of books must certainly affect the decision to keep something on the backlist or not.

One reason Doherty and Nielsen Hayden were on the panel is that Tor is actively backlisting books and working at bringing back older works by current authors. The latter is through their Orb line, trade paperbacks on acid-free paper with larger print, and a press run of under 15,000, and a higher price than a mass-market paperback.

This statement by them led to a discussion of what exactly a trade paperback was. In common terms, a mass-market paperback is the "small" paperback size and costs about US\$5-7, while a trade paperback is larger, almost the size of a hardback, and costs about US\$10-15. In fact, the real definition of a trade paperback is that it is a lower-priced edition, distributed through regular books distributors (not magazine distributors), and fully returnable (i.e., non-strippable). (Mass-market books are strippable; that is, if they don't sell the bookstore can rip off--strip--the cover and return just that for a full refund while destroying the rest of the book. This saves on shipping costs but

means that far more books need to be printed than are actually sold.) The size of the book, which is what most people use as a guide, is immaterial. The real reason for the different size is that when they tried making trade paperbacks in the smaller size, the bookstores didn't realize they were not strippable, and would rip the covers off and send just them back instead of returning the entire book. All British paperbacks are trade paperbacks, which helps explain some of the price difference.

In fact, Nielsen Hayden said that existence of mass-market paperbacks is fluke of the American magazine distribution system. Unfortunately, people have gotten used to the idea that everything will be reprinted in cheap mass-market editions, and even express resentment that publishers put out hardbacks and trade paperbacks at all. (How many times have you heard someone say, "I'll wait for the paperback"? Or complain that they can't vote on the Hugos because the publishers didn't issue the paperbacks soon enough?)

Runte then told a story which demonstrated that some publishers just can't be bothered backlisting books. It seems he was trying to get a certain book on the reading list for his regional school board. To do this, the publisher had to promise to keep it in print for seven years. However, having it on the list guaranteed sales of 350,000 units over that time. The publisher who had the

rights didn't think it was worth it. Doherty thought this astonishing, as Tor will print anything they think can sell a thousand copies over an eighteen-month period.

(This raises the issue of what the average press run for a hardback book is. Someone mentioned that Arkham House's press run for their John Kessel collection was five thousand copies, yet they are considered a small press, so I would guess that a thousand copies is a very small run indeed. Orb's "under 15,000" covers a wide range.)

Someone asked if "books on demand" wouldn't solve the problem of storing backlisted books in a warehouse. (There was a United States Supreme Court decision, the "Thor Power Tools decision," that declared that assets in warehouse, including books, were

taxable assets and could not be depreciated. This made storing books financially impractical, and a lot of books were pulped and went out of print shortly thereafter.) But the fact is that the printing and binding of individual books on demand is still too expensive for the average reader; services that do this (such as Books on Demand in Ann Arbor, Michigan) now usually charge US\$100 or so per book.

In addition to the Thor Power Tools decision, publishers have had other problems with the government. They are the only businesses not eligible for small-business loans from the government, because that would supposedly interfere with freedom of the press. That sounds backwards until you think about the fact that the w_i_t_h_h_o_l_d_i_n_g of grants from the National Endowment for the Arts has been denounced as censorship. Much better, reasons the government, to stay out of the publishing industry entirely. (All this applies to just the United States, of course. What goes on in other countries is undoubtedly different.)

Someone was surprised that publishers were considered "small businesses." Nielsen Hayden responded, "The combined janitorial staff of the automotive industry probably outnumber the entire publishing industry two to one." Someone else added, "And are probably better paid."

How can people encourage backlisting? Well, buy older books. If your bookstore stocks only the latest releases, ask them to special-order the books you want. If they won't or can't, use the mail-order services of the various specialty bookstores (Science Fiction Shop in New York City, Uncle Hugo's and Dreamhaven in Minneapolis, Other Change of Hobbit in Berkeley, and so on--I can send you a list with addresses and phone numbers if you ask for one.) Conventions could provide a list of the dealers in the Dealers Room who do mail order.

Someone noted that hardbacks, trade paperbacks, and mail-ordering were expensive. Nielsen Hayden responded to that by noting that most fans in the audience spend more on hotels for conventions each

year than on books. As he put it, "You're hotel fans, not book fans." (A room in Winnipeg for four nights split two ways was about US\$200 each. That's about 40 mass-market paperbacks, 13 trade paperbacks, or 9 hardbacks. [Well, this explains why people wait for the mass-market paperback.]) Of course, some people spend more in the Dealers Room at conventions than for hotels, never mind what they spend in bookstores the rest of the year.

For questions from the audience, Mayhew made people get up and stand in line for a microphone. In theory, this is supposed to make access more fair, with less favoritism shown by the moderator in calling on people. In actual practice, it's a royal pain, particularly for the disabled or those with quantities of stuff in their lap.

Panel: How We Deal With Death & Dying

Sunday, 1 PM

George Barr (mod), Connie Willis, Lois H. Mangan, Barry B. Longyear

Description: This is something that we all will do at least once in our life, but how do we really feel about it?

Barr started this by jokingly asking the panelists to relate their latest "near-death" experience, but it turned out that several of them actually had one to relate. Speaking of his own heart attack, Barr said, "I don't fear death; I fear dying. It's painful."

Willis wasn't quite sure why she was on the panel, unless it's because she "kills off everyone and everything" in her stories. (She says this is so they won't make her write sequels.)

Hayman (who is a professional bereavement counselor) said that the major problem in dealing with death and dying is that people see grieving as a sign of weakness. Barr supported this idea, adding that men are not allowed to cry. He said for a long time the only time he would cry was in movies, where it was dark and no one could see him.

Also, modern social structures do not allow time for grieving. (How much time off does your company give an employee whose spouse has just died?) Hayman says you should wait at least a year before making any major decisions, but frequently people are forced to decide sooner on a lot of major economic decisions.

Willis said that she never understood why science fiction was called an "escapist literature," because it's in science fiction where death and dying (and other "heavy" issues) are examined in the most detail with the most "what if?" questions. She gave as

examples Philip K. Dick's D_o_A_n_d_r_o_i_d_s_D_r_e_a_m_o_f
E_l_e_c_t_r_i_c_S_h_e_e_p?,
 Nevil Shute's O_n_t_h_e_B_e_a_c_h, and J. G. Ballard's T_e_r_m_i_n_a_l
B_e_a_c_h. By
 dealing with non-real situations, "science fiction catches things
 in the peripheral vision" that we can't deal with directly.

Someone in the audience thought cryonics was the solution, but the panelists were skeptical of cryonics in general and also pointed out that even if it worked, people had to die eventually. Barr was also bothered by cryonics in that, as he put it, "It makes death the ultimate obscenity." As Willis pointed out, in Victorian times sex was taboo in literature and death was described in great detail. Now it's the other way around. Barr also objected to the idea that only those who could afford immortality or longevity could have them.

The panelists touched briefly on the topic of immortality. (There have been anthologies about immortality, but ironically they are out-of-print, hence as the editing panel said, effectively dead.)

This discussion of cryonics and immortality also raised the philosophical question: is death an end or a transition? If there is something after life, what does staying here overly long mean?

Once again, one of the panelists seemed to be using this more as a personal therapy session than as a panel.

Panel: Importance/Ethics of Terraforming Other Planets
 Sunday, 2 PM

Roger MacBride Allen (mod), Frederick Andrew Lerner,
 Stanley Schmidt, John Strickland Jr.

Description: How can we justify this work to the universe?

One suspects most of the panelists were in favor of terraforming. Schmidt said, "If you really want to preserve everything then you can't allow changes." Someone asked the anti-terraforming people in the audience, "Should our ancestors have come to North America?"

A fair amount of time was spent quizzing the audience on what level of indigenous life needed to exist before terraforming was wrong. Were single-celled organisms enough? What about ugly insects? What about cute, furry mammals? (The panelists seemed to think the cuteness of the animals would make a big difference to the

audience.)

Someone asked, "If time travel is possible, should we go back and deflect the meteor of 65 million years ago that killed the dinosaurs?"

Since most of the panel seemed to be various variations and rephrasings of these, without much direction, I decided to use the

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rest of the hour to do a few odds and ends as we were leaving early the next day.

Panel: Creating an Internally Consistent Religion

Sunday, 4 PM

Harry Turtledove (mod), R. Fletcher, John Hertz,
Robert Sawyer, David Wixon

Description: Every culture must have some sort of religion to hold it together, but can it be as easy as the "Great Potato" theory?

Well, it may have started off as a look at whether religions created for stories need to be consistent, but it turned it something far more interesting: a look at how real religions develop.

Fletcher (a chaplain) started off by saying that in real religions internal consistencies develop historically, but they must be consciously developed in fictional religions, and they are important. (Actually, to me it would seem more that writers need to work at avoiding inconsistencies than creating consistencies. The two are not identical, of course. The former would mean not having contradictory statements or attitudes, while the latter would include things like "cross-references," or resonances of one aspect of the religion in another. While consistencies are nice, I think the reader is more concerned with the avoidance of inconsistencies.)

Wixon (who has a degree in Islamic history) felt that internal consistencies were less important, and that the single most important thing in a religion is that it be emotionally satisfying

to its believers.

Sawyer then said, "Being the Canadian on the panel, I will take the compromise position," that is, that what is convincing to the reader is a range of belief and beliefs, not total agreement.

Turtledove said that religion starts simple; when it gets complex is when questions of interpretation arise. Fletcher responded that Turtledove, and indeed the panel as a whole, was falling into the trap of the Western perception of the origin of religion.

Hertz said that he thinks most fans are not adherents of standard religions in a recognizable form. There is a lot of skepticism in fandom and that colors the opinions of this panel. The result is that we are the victims of our own prejudices, and (for example) authors rarely write believing Jews or Christians as sympathetic characters in science fiction.

Sawyer said that when he was writing the religious parts of *Fars_e_e_r* he felt if he satisfied both Orson Scott Card (a devout

Mormon) and a Muslim friend of Sawyer's he would be happy.

Wixon observed that it was difficult for the panelists to avoid talking about real religions and to stick to the fictional ones.

Fletcher thought that was because most fictional religions were built from parts of real ones. For example, the Bajoran religion in *Star Trek: Deep Space 9* was a mixture of Judaism and Islam.

This led Hertz to say that most science fiction television is written by careless atheists: careless in the sense that they use the piece-parts of religions without really thinking about them. Others responded that the real problem was that science fiction television (or any television) was afraid of getting letters.

Someone recommended the religions in Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle's *Mot_e_i_n_G_o_d's_E_y_e* and James White's *G_e_n_o_c_i_d_a_l_H_e_a_l_e_r* as well thought out. I also think *B_a_b_y_l_o_n* 5 is doing some interesting things with religion. (J. Michael Straczynski is a self-declared

atheist, but not, in my opinion, a careless one.)

Turtledove observed, "We believed that as scientific knowledge grows, the need for the spiritual decreases." But we have since changed our minds. Tying this in to an earlier point, Hertz said that when you describe religion as something that satisfies the emotions, you have already taken a position on religion. Religionists, he noted, says that religion is not there to satisfy the emotions.

Fletcher said, however, "you get strongly attached to what you think is the truth." This was described as "intellectual emotionalism" and can cause problems. (There's an understatement.) Part of this attachment, according to Turtledove, is that "what you write will reflect yourself."

Hertz thought as long as a fictional religion was at least as consistent as we insist fictional science be, then it will work, or as he put it, "It doesn't fail on the grounds that the strings of the marionettes glitter in the sun."

Turtledove talked a bit about the henotheistic universe he created

for T h e C a s e o f t h e T o x i c S p e l l

D u m p, henotheistic being where your

god is true for you, but a different one is true for your neighbor.

(One need only read the first of the Ten Commandments to realize that early Judaism was quite probably henotheistic.)

In taking about fictional religions in general, Fletcher said, "Syncretic elements in religion have to be consistent with the basic premises of the religion." In other words, ideas adopted into a religion have to match up with what's there already. Turtledove gave the example of the importation of Zoroastrian dualism into Judaism (somewhat) and Christianity (wholesale). This led to a discussion of whether this dualism was in fact imported

into Judaism. The story of Job is the obvious "evidence" but Hertz points out that Maimonides said that the anthropomorphism there (and other places) was poetic rather than literal, and so Hertz concludes that the dualism is also poetic or metaphoric rather than

literal. By showing a conflict between good and evil, he felt it was trying to send the message, "To work for good, you can't work a little for evil."

Turtledove responded that the personification of the Devil that people see in the story of Job is indeed an importation, since Job is a very late book, written after contact with Zoroastrian ideas. Hertz noted that it was interesting how new concepts (such as the Devil) seem to take on "retroactive" life of their own and are treated as if they had always been there. Or as he quoted, "We are at war with East Asia. We have always been at war with East Asia." It's important to learn what the Party line is, he said, whether or not you believe it.

Syncretism can create inconsistencies, even in real religions, but it doesn't have to. (One example that comes to mind is the inconsistency of the story of shepherds in their fields when Jesus was born, and claiming that was in December. The latter date was imported from various pagan religions practiced in the Roman Empire.)

Another issue is whether a religion is "absolutist." Islam, for example, recognizes Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism as "religions of the Book," each with some truth. But the attitude that there may be some truth in other religions is also culturally determined.

Someone in the audience claimed that all religions, or at least all "major religions" (as the audience member put it) appeal to power, fear, or virtue. Turtledove felt this was not true of several religions, all of which happened to be non-Western, leading him to observe that most people say, "A major religion is mine: a cult is yours."

Turtledove also reminded us, "One of the things we underestimate is the strength of belief religion can inspire." We can co-exist in the United States (and some other countries) because our theological faith is less strong, because we have science and secularism as an alternative answer. Fletcher responded that he felt that neo-paganism was a reaction, not against Christianity, but against the very secularism and atheism that Turtledove mentions. (Regarding atheism, one person noted that there may be a lot of people who claim to be atheists, but that "the god they fail to believe in is a white male.")

Wixon said that one obstacle to writing about a completely new religion is that you can't write a story about a truly alien

character. About the best you can do is to write about trying to
_ c _ o _ m _ p _ r _ e _ h _ e _ n _ d a truly alien character.

Regarding someone's comment about televangelists, Hertz said, "If you didn't worship idols, it wouldn't be so shocking that they had feet of clay."

Masquerade
Sunday, 8 PM

Well, the masquerade started with a Hugo presentation. It seems that Bob Eggleton, who had won the Hugo for Best Artist, hadn't been present to receive his award, but when he found out about it he was so excited he couldn't sleep and eventually decided to get a flight from Rhode Island so he could come and pick it up. (As Barry Longyear said, "O ye of little faith!") They had George Barr up to do the presenting as he had the night before and he said, "Not only wouldn't they let me have it last night, but they dragged me back here to humiliate me again. But I'm _ s _ o nice."

(As an aside, while it was a nice gesture of ConAdian to allow Eggleton to come up to receive his award at a later time, it does set a bit of a bad precedent of giving better treatment [in the sense of not having to share the spotlight] to people who don't come to the convention unless they win over those who were there from the beginning. It also sets a bad precedent in giving sleep-deprived people more chance to give longer, less coherent speeches. Understand that I am not criticizing Eggleton for this, but someone who was thinking more clearly should have considered these issues.)

As a result of all this, the actual masquerade did not start until 8:38 PM. There were only fifty costumes, but for some reason there was an intermission from 9:30 PM to 9:50 PM, making the evening even longer. (I heard the awards were not announced until after 1 AM, which is totally unreasonable for a fifty-entry masquerade scheduled to start at 8 PM. The presentations alone took until after 10:30 PM.)

Kat Connery as the Mistress of Ceremonies was very good, being able to ad lib when necessary and keep the crowd entertained. There were also several very good costumes. John Mitchell and Scott Corwin did a very good walker in "Imperial Ground Assault Forces" which was somewhat undercut by a very similar power loader in Jeff Ergeron and Stephanie Richardson's "The Bitch Is Back: Queen Alien and Power Loader." "The Borg" by Florence Achenbach, Steve Fansher, and Missouri Smith was very good (assuming it was an

original creation and not a Borg suit from a dealer). "The 19th Century League of Futurists" by Kathy Sanders, Drew Sanders, Gavin Claypool, Robbie Cantor, Laurraine Tutuhasi, Len Wein, and Twilight was one of the most elaborately designed. From where we were sitting, the detail work on Gordon Smuder and Jennifer Menken's

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"Carousel Armour" looked impressive, but we didn't get a chance to see it up close.

Other costumes of note were Walter Thompson's "Series W.T.3"; Steve Swope, Catherine Peters, and Toni Narita's "Afternoon Matinee"; "Radioactive Hamsters from a Planet Near Mars" by Ed Charpentier, Louise Hypher, Cathy Leeson, Cindy Huckle, and Colleen Hillerup; "Festival of Change" by Eileen Capes, Katherine Jepson, and Kevin Jepson; and "Xanadu" by Nora Mai and Bruce Mai.

One criticism I heard from a few people was that there was a slide projected on the screen for the "Boston in 1998" entry, while no other entries (including a "Baltimore in 1998" entry) had slides. It turns out that anyone _ c _ o _ u _ l _ d have had a slide, but no one else asked. Unfortunately, this was not widely known, and the result was that ConAdian _ a _ p _ p _ e _ a _ r _ e _ d to be showing favoritism toward the Boston bid.

Panel: Time Travel Which Alters History

Monday, 1 PM

Robert Sawyer (mod), Frederik Pohl, S. M. Stirling,
Harry C. Stubbs, Ariane Von Orlow

Description: How would we change the present if we could change the past.

[Well, I would somehow convince the con committee to schedule this earlier, so that those of us who had to leave early for Rosh Hashonah could attend it.]

Miscellaneous

At each of the last four conventions I've gone to, someone has mistaken me for Connie Willis. Here it happened at the Australia

in '99 party when someone said he really liked me on my panel about humor in science fiction. It happened a couple of other times as well, but those people were joking.

The WSFS Business Meeting passed an amendment authorizing retrospective Hugos for 50, 75, or 100 years previous to a given convention, so long as Hugos were not awarded for that year already. The motion to eliminate zones for Worldcons didn't even make it past the initial round of consideration. They passed on to Intersection a proposal to restrict Worldcons from being held within 60 miles of the NASFiC held in the voting year, to take effect starting with the 1999 Worldcon (I believe).

I used to rank all the Worldcons I had been to, but it was getting harder and harder to fit the new ones in, perhaps because the cons of twenty years ago are hard to remember in detail, so instead I will split them into three groups: the good, the average, and the

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below-average. Within each group they are listed chronologically.

The good: Noreascon I (1971), Midamericon (1976), Noreascon II (1980), L.A.con II (1984), Noreascon III (1989), and MagiCon (1992).

The average: Discon II (1974), Seacon (1978), Chicon IV (1982), Confederation (1986), ConFiction (1990), Chicon V (1991), ConFrancisco (1993), and ConAdian (1994).

The below-average: Iguanacon (1978), Suncon (1977), Constellation (1983), Conspiracy (1985), and Nolacon II (1988).

This con report runs about 27,000 words. Before I started, I wrote, "If this is higher than last year's (24,000), it's because I could type as I went on my palmtop. If it's lower, it's because I had to type it on my palmtop. (And also because I just finished a 6300-word report of the Montreal Film Festival.)" So I was covered either way. As you can see, verbosity and the convenience of being able to type it in while traveling in planes, trains, and automobiles won out.

And of course, I had a reputation to uphold, especially after Maia Cowan told me that at the electronic fandom panel, Ken Meltsner said I was a "one-woman information superhighway."

At ConAdian, I went to twenty-two panels, a one-man show, and a film. At ConFrancisco I went to twenty-four panels and two lectures; at MagiCon I went to sixteen panels: at Chicon V I went to twelve panels (I was a real slacker in those days!). I have probably leveled off at the two-dozen mark, so my reports will only get longer if I start transcribing every word said. (Had I not had to leave early for Rosh Hashonah, I might have gotten to a couple more panels.)

Site selection seemed a hard-fought battle, but San Antonio won by a 2-1 margin. 1437 votes were cast, compared to 1286 last year and 2541 the year before that. Algis Budrys and Michael Moorcock will be the Guests of Honor. Neal Barrett, Jr., will be the "Master of Toasts." The convention will be called LoneStarCon 2 and will be August 28 to September 1, 1997. Contact address in the United States is LoneStarCon 2, P. O. Box 27277, Austin TX 78755-2277, or electronically at shiva@io.com, SMOFBBS@aol.com, 72247.2132@compuserve.com, E.COOLEY@genie.geis.com, and about half a dozen other addresses. (It is the most electronically connected con I've seen.)

Next year in Glasgow! [-ecl]

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History is a set of lies agreed upon.
-- Napoleon Bonaparte