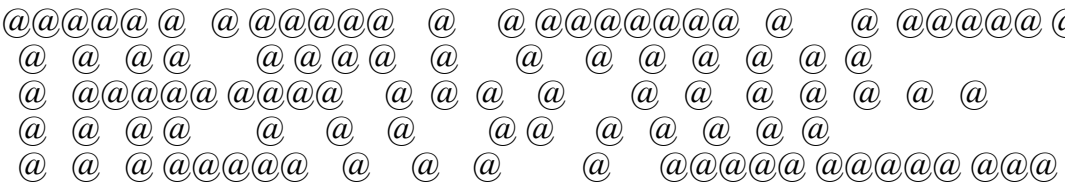

Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
Club Notice - 10/13/95 -- Vol. 14, No. 15

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are in Middletown 5T-415
Wednesdays at noon.

DATE	TOPIC
10/25/95	Book: BEYOND THIS HORIZON by Robert A. Heinlein
11/15/95	Book: MIDSHIPMAN'S HOPE by David Feintuch
12/06/95	Book: TBD

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 3F-434 908-957-5619 m.r.leeper@att.com
HO Chair: John Jetzt MT 2E-530 908-957-5087 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 3F-434 908-957-5619 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. Reminder: There will be an SF Club field trip to see STRANGE DAYS at the Hazlet Multiplex for the first matinee Saturday, October 14.

For those not going to that, you might want to go to New York for the Octavia Butler signing for her short story collection BLOODCHILD at the Science Fiction Shop, 168 Thompson Street, between 4 PM and 6 PM. Call 212-473-3010 for further details. [-ecl]

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2. Quick request: Every week I get an error message:

> [002] Mail was received that was addressed to unknown addresses.
> Mail item was not delivered to:
> INDIANAPIN/UF9544P01/lewisd

Could whoever is forwarding the VOID to this address please fix it?
Thank you. [-ecl]

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3. There is a new sign up outside my office building in Middletown. There is a road around the building between the parking lot and the building. And on the sidewalk, facing the cars that drive around the building, is a sign. And on the sign is a picture of a standard triangular yield sign. And under the yield sign it says "Yield to pedestrians in walkway." w this is just the sort of landscape detail most people never think about. It is also the sort of thing that I like to ask myself questions about. Is there some need for that sign I am not seeing? What I want to know is, what are your alternatives? What choice do you have? Are are really places in this country where they don't have signs like that and the rule is if you are driving toward the crosswalk, and there is a pedestrian in that crosswalk, THAT SUCKER IS YOURS. Are there places with laws like that in this country? Or any country? Are there drivers who would take advantage of the rule even if they had it? I mean drivers not in the NRA?

Perhaps it is some sort of veiled threat not to the drivers but to pedestrians. Hey, pedestrian, you better use the crosswalk. Because if you don't use the crosswalk, you know what we are going to do to you, don't you? We are going to unleash the cars on you. And they are driven by members of the NRA who have just spent the last two hours arguing with their wives and losing. I mean, mean

guys in foul moods are going to roll over you and crunch your bones. And they will hit you and drag your injured body so you feel every little bump in the road tearing the flesh from your body and you will die. Just because you didn't use the crosswalk. And it will serve you right. So there.

Of course, this is an area of Middletown where it almost impossible to get to the crosswalks in any case. I am just trying to figure what it is all about.

By the way, I may kid a certain organization here, but I want you to know it is only kidding and I have the greatest respect for those people trying to defend our precious rights to use assault rifles on the local deer and squirrel population. [-mrl]

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4. CELEBRITY VAMPIRES edited by Martin H. Greenberg (DAW, ISBN 0-88677-667-8, 1995, 318pp, US$4.99) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Is it that I am out of touch with the horror world, or is it that Martin Greenberg doesn't have the same clout with authors that editors such as Mike Resnick and Katharine Kerr have? Of the nineteen authors represented here, I have heard of only four of them, and only Kristine Kathryn Rusch is really a "name." And while some of the stories are mildly amusing, there are none of the superlative ones that can be found in other anthologies. (Ed Gorman writes the introduction and is listed as co-holder of the copyright, but it is unclear what his role was in collecting the stories.)

The problem may be the topic, of course. The whole idea of celebrity vampires may be an insurmountable obstacle to greatness. Well, almost insurmountable--I won't deny that a good author might be able to write a great story even on this topic. But no one rises to the occasion here.

Instead, we have an Irene Adler story, a Bobby Darin story, a Conan

Doyle story (having nothing to do with Sherlock Holmes), a Marilyn Monroe story, two stories with characters from the Algonquin Round Table, two with Mark Twain, two vampire Elvis stories, and the rest based on an assortment of Hollywood figures. But they serve no purpose. Harry Turtledove said once that even although alternate histories are about other worlds, they are only valuable for what they tell us about ourselves. The same is true of vampire stories (and these vampire stories are at least in some sense alternate histories), but none of these really meet that criterion. The only thing they talk about is fame--the "celebrity" aspect of the title.

"The Beautiful, the Damned" by Kristine Katherine Rusch deserves a mention. Rusch can be relied on to produce a well-written story, but for these theme anthologies she has a tendency to produce stories centering on literary figures. This is fine, except I suspect the audience for these anthologies is not going to recognize most of the figures she is writing about (whom she often does not name), or know the fine details of their lives.

If you're looking for escapist entertainment, this book will fill the bill, but there are no great stories to be found here. [-ecl]

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

Capsule review: This is an effective atmospheric police procedural murder mystery on the fringes of

horror. Two homicide detectives track a serial killer whose crimes follow a theme of the Seven Deadly Sins. It sounds like silly cable fodder. It isn't. This is a powerful intellectual thriller well-executed. It is easily comparable to THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS and like that film it is certainly not for all tastes. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4). A non-spoiler note about the Seven Deadly Sins follows the review.

A psychotic serial killer is following a theme of the Seven Deadly Sins, one murder for each sin. In each case someone who committed the sin in life dies by the sin. The basic plot sounds almost like it could have been a Vincent Price camp-horror film from the 1960s. And without very good writing and direction the result could easily have been laughable. But Andrew Kevin Walker's first produced screenplay is an hypnotic thriller with an effective sepulchral tone. It is surprising how much in this film sounds cliched or silly but in skilled hands works well. In addition to what could have been a hokey premise this is a police procedural with two police homicide detectives who learn to respect each other. One is new to the job; one has one week to go before retirement. But these cliches turn out to be only superficial details of a more powerful plot. More important is the relationship between the quarry and his hunters.

William Somerset (played by Morgan Freeman) is the retiring detective who has just found that the job has taken too big a piece out of his life. He is emotionally drained a combination of caring too much while trying too hard not to care. His replacement is David Mills (Brad Pitt), a young idealist who still has a fire in his belly. Somerset takes quickly to the peculiarities of this unusual case, brushing up on his Dante, Chaucer, and St. Augustine to get a better understanding of the killer's inspiration. Mills resists that slow deliberate approach.

What makes SE7EN's style even more surprising is not just that it is director David Fincher's second film, but that his first was ALIEN 3, a very badly flawed film. Perhaps the problems were mostly in the script, but Fincher's direction certainly did not do much for that film. Of course in this time around Fincher has Morgan Freeman, an actor who certainly has screen presence. Brad Pitt cannot match Freeman's performance and he has less he can do with this role than he could with the one in LEGENDS OF THE FALL. As the energetic young detective with a constant three-day growth of beard (how does he do that?) he just is not as engaging and playing with Freeman he cannot make himself the center of attention. The actor who plays the killer--it would not be much of a spoiler to reveal his name, but I will refrain--does a really fine job of combining cool and menace. The film builds to a shocking and memorable climax and kudos for that scene go to him

and to Walker's writing.

SE7EN is hard to watch as an emotionally tearing film. While it is very reserved about showing actual violence on the screen, we do see the aftermath of the murders and these scenes are graphic. But the film is also harder to watch because of the photographic style. This is the sort of subject matter that would be enhanced by black-and-white photography. To create much the same effect, the scenes are generally shot in muted browns and blacks. For much of the film, indoor scenes are either misty or dusty, and outdoor scenes take place in the rain. A supremely downbeat mood is achieved by Darius Khondji's photography.

This was a real surprise, a mystery with a genuine sense of menace with a killer as dangerous as Hannibal Lector and perhaps more credible. I rate this one a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

Just as an historical note, originally there were really Eight Deadly Sins. However there was no strong belief in the mystical power of the number eight before the computer age so the number was whittled down to the much more powerful count of seven. Even with seven there was no strong agreement on just what the sins were. It is always clear that Lust, Gluttony, Anger, Pride, and Avarice were to be considered Deadly Sins. The remainder of the seven or eight were chosen from Sloth, Envy, Vainglory, Apathy, and Gloominess. With the choice of seven generally one hears quoted Sloth and Envy as the other two sins. These are the Deadly Sins from such diverse sources as Marlowe's "Dr. Faustus" and Cook and Moore's BEDAZZLED. No doubt the choice of these sins was a relief to the vainglorious and perhaps even the gloomy. The apathetic probably did not care. [-mrl]

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6. TO DIE FOR (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

> Capsule: Buck Henry's script from the novel by Joyce Maynard cuts a wide swath, lambasting lookism, the media, the sensation-hungry viewing public, and the triumph of style over substance. The film begins with a bang with on-target humor but loses its oomph in the mild final chapter. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4)

The screen has had a lot of smart and beautiful but cold and calculating women. They lurk in films like DOUBLE INDEMNITY, PRETTY POISON, and THE LAST SEDUCTION. Gus Van Zant's TO DIE FOR suggests that most of us in the TV generation can no longer detect smart and it is enough just to be beautiful. The film is in large part a portrait of Suzanne Stone (played by Nicole Kidman), who is

a breathtaking but pompous and clueless woman with the personality of a spider. The film opens with the media swarming over a sensational, sex-related crime in the aptly-named backwater town of Little Hope, New Hampshire. In scatter-shot scenes we see a montage of interviews with Suzanne, with her sister-in-law, and one with her parents and in-laws all discussing a combination crime and sex scandal. Eventually we start seeing the pieces of the story in flashback. Suzanne, the beautiful daughter from a WASPy family marries the cutest boy in town (Matt Dillon), the bar-tending son of a restaurateur. Both families had misgivings over the marriage, but Larry is awestruck by the china-doll beauty and Suzanne is hard to say no to. When Suzanne gets a job as the weather girl at a local cable station, she has visions of becoming another Barbara Walters (whom she slyly puts down for being Jewish). When Larry, her husband, starts hinting that it is time to have children, Suzanne decides she has married unwisely and begins planning how to correct the situation, perhaps with the help of three scruffy, disaffected teens she is interviewing for a documentary.

Nicole Kidman has to play Suzanne Stone as a difficult combination of stupid and savvy. She spouts naive pop-philosophy and empty aphorisms and yet is able to succeed at what she wants, mostly because of her good looks. I would hope it was a difficult combination for Ms. Kidman to play. Matt Dillon glides through his role as her husband without much apparent effort. Standing out considerably more are Illeana Douglas and especially Dan Hedaya as Larry's sister and father. There are few actors who can express suppressed rage (and occasionally unsuppressed rage) as well as Hedaya. Also a particularly good casting decision was to have Joaquin Phoenix, Casey Affleck, and Alison Folland as the three not-too-bright teenagers. All three, but particularly Phoenix, look like real teenagers on the street rather than actors, and that is a much needed effect to make the story work. In fact, Phoenix and Folland prove to be actors more talented than one might expect from their new-comer status.

The telling of the story starts very strong and its jibes are both on target and laugh-out-loud funny. But the tone of the film subtly alters during the course of the film and while the plot is tied up at the end, the climax is just a bit quiet and under-

powered for the rest of the film.

In the end TO DIE FOR has gotten in some good punches, but the fight is a draw. I give this one a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

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7. Intersection 1995 (a convention report by Evelyn C. Leeper) (part 4 of probably 6 parts):

No More Noble Savage:
Technology and Genocide of Native Peoples
Saturday, 15:00
Henry Balen (m), Daniel Marcus,
Dale Skran, Amy Thomson

"Does technological growth mean genocide for native peoples? This has been the rule for the last century, but are there other better ways?"

I will insert my own observation here that occurred to me on reading about this panel. We are the result of some cultures being absorbed by other more technological ones. If no culture had ever wiped out another, we wouldn't be here. And, as I noted at one point, there have been previous cases of one superpower trying to control the world and force its government, religion, etc., on everyone else, and that was imperial Rome. And certainly the Roman culture was more advanced technologically than Greek or Middle Eastern culture, and did in fact conquer them, legislate Roman ways, and disperse the people. As I observed, this must be why we have so many temples to Jupiter and Mercury, and why the religions and customs of the Middle East have totally vanished. Or put less sarcastically, which had the more lasting influence: the technological conqueror or the native peoples of Judea?

But back to the panel.

Balen began by asking if it is possible to have technological

societies coexist with non-technological cultures? Marcus said that there really seemed to be two parts to the question: "Is genocide a bad thing? Yes. Is technology a bad thing? That's harder to answer."

There was discussion of forcible change inflicted by the over-culture. The example mentioned was that of child-napping (basically) of American Indian children in the early part of this century to be sent to boarding schools and taught "American" ways. (A similar example would be the conscription of young Jewish boys into the Russian military in the last century for twenty-five-year terms.)

There was also mention of the fact that the United States government seemed (seems?) less concerned about the pollution of Indian lands than of other areas.

Thomson noted that child-napping is not technological, and not really the focus of the panel. We should stick to discussions of technology, she claimed, and gave the example of Meiji Japan. Thomson said that they themselves decided they had to become technological. (This is debatable, at least based on what I know about the period.)

Skran asked if it was *possible* for the two levels of technology to coexist. His answer was that it was possible only if the technologically advanced society enforces it. They may want to do it for ethical reasons, or in the interest in cultural diversity, but they have to actively decide to follow this sort of a "Prime Directive." (He gave the example of Michael Armstrong's AGVIQ, a post-holocaust world in which native skills are critical.)

Thomson suggested that another reason for preserving the "native" culture was that the "more advanced" culture might want the feeling of power it got from controlling the native people. (All these terms are loaded of course, and in fact the whole issue of cultural relativism was later raised.)

Skran returned to the question of what would be an ethical way to manage a relationship with a native people. The panelists pretty

much agreed that it has to be possible for individuals to leave the native culture. For example, in Mike Resnick's "Kirinyaga" stories, a dissatisfied member goes to a certain spot and a certain time, and says the equivalent of "Beam me up, Scotty," and they're out. In Sheri S. Tepper's SIDESHOW, on the other hand, members in one society can be restrained from leaving, which results in a much less stable set of societies.

Marcus raised the question of whether a technological culture is intrinsically expansionist, but this remained unanswered.

Thomson noted in regard to letting the decisions be made by the native culture, "They will absorb what they want and that may or may not be good for them but you have to let them make those decisions."

Balen asked what the difference is between adopting a culture and having it forced upon it, but this too wasn't dealt with, although Marcus gave the example of the Marshall Islands culture being totally destroyed by the United States.

Some people also expressed concern about cultures being supported as folk cultures instead of as "material" cultures (by which I assume my note meant real cultures). Skran asked if there are any currently surviving native cultures that haven't adopted the material base of the main culture. Thomson claimed the Navajo fit this description, but other panelists disagreed, saying the Navajo have adopted the material culture, and also make most of their money from tourism, which would not seem to describe a culture viable outside of the "folk culture" context. Someone in the audience suggested that the Hopi may be doing a better job of saving their culture than the Navajo. Everyone did agree that cultures don't exist in a vacuum in any case. Someone mentioned the book IN THE ABSENCE OF THE SACRED by Jerry Mander on this subject. Marcus asked if a static culture, as people seemed to be

favoring, was in fact a good thing. Skran noted that a perfectly preserved native culture would of necessity be one you couldn't leave, and that would be unethical--in effect, condemning all members born into that culture to imprisonment within it. Skran

also said he agrees with Mander that genocide is bad, but disagrees with Mander's contention that technology is bad.

It is true, if one looks at history, that static cultures can survive a long time; examples would be ancient Egypt and China. But static cultures have problems when they come up against another equally powerful or more powerful civilization and may find it more difficult to adapt. A static culture can easily become the tree that breaks rather than the tree that bends.

Someone in the audience said that native developments meed to be valued by the technological culture, and said this wasn't happening. Someone (Balen?) suggested TALES OF A SHAMAN'S APPRENTICE by Mark J. Plotkin as an example of this happening, though others felt that this was *not* what Plotkin was doing. The claim they made was that Plotkin was picking and choosing what he wanted to use from the native culture rather than taking it as a whole. Skran raised what seemed like the perfectly obvious objection to this attitude: if the native culture should be allowed to pick and choose what it wants from the technological culture, then any culture should be able to pick and choose what it wants from another culture.

Thomson pointed out that the panel was starting to talk about "better" and "worse" instead of looking at how cultures function from different basic cultural assumptions. True, but one could also say that antebellum Southern culture had the basic cultural assumption that slavery was commanded by God. Does that mean that we cannot apply the term "worse" to that culture? Or even more paradoxical, if our culture has the cultural assumption that judging cultures as "better" or "worse" is valid, by their own rules it would seem as though cultural relativists cannot criticize us for doing so.

THE TIME MACHINE, 100 Years On
Saturday, 16:00
Robert J. Sawyer (m), Stephen Baxter,
Robert Silverberg, Brian Stableford

"How influential has Wells been for today's writers? Is he still someone we can learn from, and if so, what? How readable is his work now--does it have anything to say to us in a contemporary sense, or is it becoming a period piece. And how well does THE TIME MACHINE in particular stand up after a hundred years?"

The audio problems still exist in Hall 3, and while the panelists fiddled with their microphones, someone noted that hard science fiction writers are the ones who can find the switch on the microphone.

The panelists began with the question, "Is THE TIME MACHINE a seminal work for today's writers?"

Baxter said yes--the language was fresh and modern, and Wells invented the idea of using a mechanical, controllable method of time travel where previous writers had relied on magic or wishing. THE TIME MACHINE is simultaneously an adventure, a social parable, and evolutionary parable, and a parable about science. It can be read by a twelve-year-old, or analyzed by literary critics.

Stableford agreed, adding that it served as an example of both a novel and a short story, being the first item in Wells's COLLECTED NOVELS and also in Wells's COLLECTED SHORT WORKS.

Silverberg was more ambivalent. He said that Wells was the best writer who ever wrote science fiction, and that it's been going downhill ever since 1910. Wells, for example wrote the first time travel story, the first alien invasion story, and the first superman story. But THE TIME MACHINE is no longer seminal for a science fiction writer, because it has been so thoroughly assimilated that it is not necessary to go back to the source--it is more necessary to see what has already been done with it. It is, however, seminal for science fiction readers. As he said, "The ten-year-old Robert Silverberg found that book in 1945 and was never the same again."

Sawyer said he first encountered it as the "Classics Illustrated" comic book and the movie. He finally read the book, coincidentally enough, in the SCIENCE FICTION HALL OF FAME, VOLUME I, edited by Robert Silverberg. But Sawyer noted that the novel can be read in a lot of different ways and suggested the panelists start with it as a work of science fiction.

Baxter said that one important thing to observe was that THE TIME MACHINE has precisely imagined and described details. Many of these are in some of the parts taken out of the serial before book publication. Stableford said that the novel provided the method for the genre, as well as providing the basic stories. (The method referred to was that of searching the environment for nuggets of ideas and then extrapolating them.) Silverberg reminded us that Wells regarded his science fiction as apprentice work while

preparing to do his real novels. As Silverberg noted, most of these are not read today, just as the other novelists of Wells's style such as Henry James and Joseph Conrad are no longer still popular entertainers, but Wells as an author of science fiction is.

Sawyer talked about the scene in which the Time Traveller arrives in a rainstorm in 802,701 C.E. and how Wells was able to reveal the scene gradually, rather than abruptly giving a 360-degree inventory of what the Time Traveller saw.

The panelists then turned to the Morlock/Eloi dichotomy and Wells's social commentary. Baxter said that the Time Traveller tries to interpret what he sees, but he can't be sure if he's right, and he knows it. Stableford said that although Wells was a brilliant writer, he was not of the intelligentsia, but was the son of a servant, and spent a lot of his youth living underground ("below stairs") in servants' quarters. In fact, one reason that Wells wanted to write serious novels was for respectability. Silverberg said that he always found the Eloi/Morlock story the least interesting, probably because he aspires to be an Eloi.

In passing, Sawyer noted that the most 1990s thing Wells did was to leave room for a sequel. (And as Baxter's talk earlier showed, authors have taken advantage of this.)

It was noted that we still have time travel stories, but not a lot of alien invasion stories, anti-gravity space ship stories, or invisible man stories. (Yes, I know there are exceptions.) Why is this, and is THE TIME MACHINE Wells's greatest novel?

Baxter said that it probably was, although THE WAR OF THE WORLDS may have been greater when the pastoral English countryside was more familiar. A twelve-year-old can read THE TIME MACHINE much as he or she would read GULLIVER'S TRAVELS--as an adventure story, without worrying about the underlying meanings. Stableford felt that THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU might actually be more relevant today (as well as THE FIRST MEN IN THE MOON).

Silverberg partially disagreed, saying THE FIRST MEN IN THE MOON

seems merely quaint now, but THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU is as "alive and quivering" as it was when it was first published. He also thought that THE WAR OF THE WORLDS still has relevance and is a perfect novel. In fact, he intends to write a response to it (whatever that means). (He also mentioned that Wells also wrote seventy short stories.) The only one of Wells's seven best-known novels that Silverberg thinks is antiquarian is THE FIRST MEN IN THE MOON. And of Wells's lesser known works, Silverberg recommends MR. BLETTSWORTHY ON RAMPOLE ISLAND as well. He also mentioned the extrapolated technology in THE WAR IN THE AIR, which Wells wrote after earlier denying the role of the airplane, and speculates that this turnabout was due in part to others' writings. Stableford agreed that much of THE FIRST MEN IN THE MOON was dated, but said that what was valuable was the Selenite society.

I asked, "This may be more a question about the readers perhaps, but if one of these were unearthed today and hence eligible for a

Hugo, would it get nominated? Would it win?"

In response, Stableford said he wondered if the Verne novel was genuine or just a clever fake. Sawyer said that Stanley Schmidt (editor of ANALOG) said that if Wells had cut the first ten pages of THE TIME MACHINE, Schmidt would have printed it. And Silverberg noted that the real test is whether an author is read, and Wells *is* still read.

Mark Leeper asked about the one novel of the "Big Seven" that they hadn't mentioned, IN THE DAYS OF THE COMET. Baxter responded that Wells believed we were in a collective madness, but the basic implausibility of the novel works against it. This is also true of THE WORLD SET FREE and THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME.

Stableford thought IN THE DAYS OF THE COMET belongs with the other books in which Wells was developing his Utopian dream, saying, "Resentment works better in fictional form."

From the audience, Jack Cohen proposed that the Eloi/Morlock stuff is boring because Wells, by writing about it, has changed the world away from a path that would lead to it. The panelists thought that

this was a possibility, though they said that Wells was a believer in the "Tide of History" rather than the "Great Man."

Someone asked about what Wells did about time paradoxes and the answer was that he didn't worry about them, or about the fact that the Time Traveller was in two places at one time. Someone else in the audience objected to Wells's sexual stereotyping and terrestrial chauvinism (and also to his apparent belief that there are things that science shouldn't probe), to which Silverberg replied, "Bless you, I haven't heard a word of PC since I left California two weeks ago."

Kaffeeklatsch--Harry Turtledove
Saturday, 17:00

This was very well attended, with its full complement and a waiting list besides. As we were settling in, someone asked if it didn't bother Turtledove to let the bad guys win in THE GUNS OF THE SOUTH, and Turtledove noted that S. M. Stirling did an even more thorough job of it in his "Draka" series.

Turtledove began by talking about his new book coming out, THE TWO GEORGES, co-authored with Richard Dreyfuss. I asked him why they didn't use the Gainsborough on the cover, and Turtledove said that the marketing people thought it more important to get the names of the authors on the cover.

How did this book come about? Well, apparently Dreyfuss had been interested in alternate history for a long time and liked THE GUNS OF THE SOUTH, which he read after seeing an article about Turtledove and the book in the LOS ANGELES TIMES. So he called Turtledove to suggest they have lunch together because he had this idea for a book and, while Turtledove was skeptical, he went ahead anyway, and thus the project began. It was delayed somewhat, since Dreyfuss was also making movies at the time and couldn't always keep up to the writing pace Turtledove was used to. Turtledove admitted that the writing in THE TWO GEORGES was mostly his own,

but said that the characterization and dialogue are heavily Dreyfuss's.

Later I asked him if he had seen the episode of SLIDERS with a similar premise about there being no successful American Revolution, but Turtledove said he had never watched SLIDERS (probably a wise move on his part--it's not that good a show).

Someone mentioned that THE GUNS OF THE SOUTH didn't seem to be marketed as science fiction, often showing up in the mainstream fiction section, and occasionally even in the history section! The latter is primarily in the South, supposedly. In connection with this "cross-over" aspect, Turtledove said that he had received the John Esther Cook Award for Southern Fiction in 1993 from the Order of the Stars and Bars, and described attending the awards dinner. Labeling himself as a conservative, Turtledove said at this event he felt like a far-left liberal, and wondered what some of the black waiters felt about the whole affair--but hadn't the nerve to ask. THE GUNS OF THE SOUTH has been translated into Italian, Spanish, and probably Russian at this point, but not French.

Turtledove got started writing alternate histories with his "Basil Argyrios" stories. In the first one ("Unholy Trinity," a.k.a. "Etos Kosmou 6824" in AGENT OF BYZANTIUM, 1985), Basil Argyrios finds the Franks in Spain using gunpowder and adopts it. The idea behind this series is that Mohammed became a Christian, and because there was no Muslim threat, Byzantium never fell, but instead faced a technologically sophisticated Persia. Asked whether he had any "Salman Rushdie sorts of problems" with his Basil Argyrios stories, Turtledove said no, because he is just an infidel, not an apostate.

Someone asked what Turtledove used to do before he quit his day job; he had been a technical writer for the Los Angeles Board of Education. Now he is a full-time writer. He writes two and a half to three hours a day, 350 days a year. (He takes time out for a few conventions.) The rest of the day is not idle; it goes toward reading and research for his writing. He is working on four things now, which is the maximum multi-tasking he can do. Someone said at this point, "I always worry when a writer quits his day job," to which Turtledove responded, "So does the writer." But he forces

himself to write every day, because "if you wait for the Muse to strike, you will starve." He writes his first drafts by hand, because when he types, "all the crap comes out." Writing is slower, and forces him to edit as he writes. Currently he is working on a straight historical novel about Justinian II.

Someone asked about his books written as "Eric Iverson." When they were first published, Belmont wanted to use "Eric Iverson" as the byline, saying no one would buy a book by an author named "Turtledove." As Turtledove explained, he was a new author who had just sold his first story and wasn't about to argue: "The first time you lose any cherry you don't care how. You worry about quality later." (Well, I'm not sure I'd agree with that philosophy as being true of everyone.) Later when he sold a story to Lester Del Rey, Del Rey insisted on using "Turtledove." So Turtledove was pressured first to use a pseudonym and then to use his real name.

Currently he is trying to place a collection which will feature his Hugo-winning story "Down in the Bottomlands." (Why should it be difficult to place such a collection? Maybe it's a question of who will pay the most, or market it the best.)

Asked about important turning points that still remain to be done well as alternate histories, Turtle dove suggested that the Romans conquering Germany and keeping it would qualify. But he reminded us that the key point in choosing a turning point or alternate world is to remember that "the interest in alternate history is the light it sheds on the world we have now."

Turtledove referred a bit about the problems that occur when you try to write an alternate history too far in the future of the change point. I call this the "Via Roma problem" (after Robert Silverberg's novella). Silverberg avoided the extreme unlikelihood of there being any sorts of parallels people, place names, etc., in a world 2000 years after the Exodus failed and Rome never fell. But the result is that the story could as easily be set on a different planet; there is little that ties it to our earth.

Masquerade
Saturday, 19:30

Well, we queued for the masquerade outside Hall 5, and got another taste of the disorganization of Intersection. At 5 PM, Mark asked at the Information Desk, "Where does one queue for the masquerade?" "Nobody has told us anything." "Who would know?" "We suggest entrails of a goat." (And they didn't even offer to supply the goat. Actually, this reminds me of the time at work when someone asked in a meeting when some product would be ready, and someone suggested reading the entrails of a goat, to which I responded, "But could we then voucher the goat as a business expense?")

At 5:30 PM, the answer was to start a queue outside Hall 5. "What if no one queues behind me?" "Make them--that's how you start a queue." So Mark did this. At 6:15 PM someone came and moved the entire queue to somewhere else.

This was all to some extent moot, as the doors opened at 6:30 PM, and the hall (which appeared to have a capacity of about 3500) was only two-thirds full for the masquerade. As usual, there was reserved seating which was at the end opened up to everyone, meaning people who arrived the earliest did not necessarily get the best seats.

The Masquerade itself actually started on time!!! There were only about twenty-five costumes, so we were out before 9 PM. The costumes were not bad, but there were no Master Class Awards (I think someone said there were only two Master Class costumes in the Masquerade). It's a trade-off--the costumes might not be as amazing as those at a North American Worldcon (it is hard to transport the costumes transatlantically), but you don't spend hours and hours seeing bad costumes either, and you get out at a reasonable time.

Parties

Having gotten out at a reasonable time, we decided to hit a few parties. Well, there *were* only a few parties, and I think we got to most of them. Other than bid parties, the party situation was grim.

The Chicago in 2000 party had the gimmick of science fiction author trading cards, available for purchase through some complicated scheme involving pre-supporting memberships. The Kansas City in 2000 lacked any identifying feature. The Australia in 1999 had the best party: it had the biggest room, the most interesting people, a ban on smoking, and Australian wine. The Moscow in 2017 was (I think) a hoax bid, and had enough vodka to cause problems with drunken fans in the hallway. The Zagreb in 1999 had plum brandy, though in somewhat smaller quantities, and very little chance of winning even if the bidders are serious. (Rumor has it that the

last Zagreb bid was not entirely serious, but that the bidders were getting support from the Yugoslav tourist bureau to promote it at conventions around the world.)

The Funny Bones Connected to the Head Bone
Sunday, 10:00
Eileen Gunn (m), Jody Lynn Nye,
Mike Resnick, Connie Willis

"Can humour help you to put across serious points? If so, why? Are people just more receptive to the message wrapped up in a pleasant package?"

I missed the beginning of this; the panel must have started on time in spite of it being so early.

Willis was saying that comedy and tragedy have the same material; it's how you deal with it (the treatment) that makes the difference.

Gunn thought that comedy is a form of avoidance, a way of avoiding reality.

Resnick said that he has written so much humorous fiction that his problem is being taken seriously. In his opinion, comedy is the unexpected happening in an expected place, or vice versa. Given that simple definition, Resnick asked why only about half a dozen people can sell humor.

Nye said that humor in general gets no respect, and said to look at the Academy Awards, where the last comedy to win for Best Picture was IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT. (I guess she doesn't count ANNIE HALL

as a comedy.) Resnick said that shouldn't be given too much weight; the Academy Awards are voted on by fewer people than the Hugos.

Willis said that she was on a panel about humor and someone asked her why no funny story had ever won a Hugo--and this was right after she had won one for "Even the Queen." (And there are lots of others. The point is that no one seems to remember them.)

Nye also felt that displaced cultures have the deepest humor to compensate for feeling out of place. Resnick agreed, saying that writing comedy is an outlet for pain and gave the example of George Alec Effinger who would write his serious work when he was feeling good, but when he was in pain he could write only comedy. Willis said she had read somewhere that after being taken to Bergen-Belsen, Anne Frank had only happy dreams. Willis also said that Hitchcock understood laughter as the release of tension to a way filmmakers since seem to have forgotten.

Resnick said that returning from ConAdian on his Winnepeg-Minneapolis flight, there were a lot of professional authors, editors, etc., and the conversation turned to, "If the plane crashes, who will be on the front page of LOCUS?"

Willis said that she thought that writers who dabble in comedy fall through into an alternate world and funny things happen to them, and related a humorous travel of trying to get to Kyrie Muir from Glamis. I'm not sure i agree--equally strange things happen to Pete Rubinstein ... or to us. As someone in the audience said later, "It's the presentation. You made us laugh, but if we told the same stories, people wouldn't laugh."

Willis told how one year she bought a full-size cardboard mock-up of Harrison Ford, thinking she could carry it on the plane, and then won a Hugo which she also had to carry on. "I owe all my success to Harrison Ford," she said. Resnick said he won a Hugo the year they were clear acrylic and when they questioned what it was at airport security, he said, "This is a rectal thermometer for an elephant." In all of these stories, Willis said, it was important to be able to laugh at yourself.

Someone quoted Asimov as once saying that humor is a bull's-eye with no target around it--you're either funny or you're not. Gunn said that was what was nice about writing humorous stories: in a story, you have many chances to be funny; it's not just one shot.

Willis noted that there are many types of humor: topical, visual, language, and general humor. She also said that humor builds. Some people will laugh at some parts of a scene, others at different ones, but everyone laughs at the end because they've been built up to it. Gunn asked if Willis actually thought about this when she was writing, and Willis instantly replied, "Yes, I do." Gunn said, "I don't think about it" at the time but she hones it later.

Gunn talked about telling or hearing a story about Nixon in which the audience laughed at the jokes because they were structured like jokes (or in scientific terms, they were joke-like objects) even if they were too young to remember Nixon.

Resnick said that once "someone asked me to record SHE with Ursula LeGuin," which led to great amusement until he corrected himself to say "Ursula Andress." But the point was that his reaction to the film was, "If they could be that funny by accident, what could they do if they tried?" And apparently this led to his creation of Lucifer Jones.

Resnick emphasized that the writer must be conscious of the audience or you could tell tales to yourself in the shower and save wear and tear on your fingertips.

What humorists do the panelists like? Willis like Goulart: "Humor does date, but his holds up well." Resnick said that Thorne Smith used to be very funny, but his Prohibition/drunk jokes aren't funny now, especially with our concern over alcoholism. Gunn said, "I

think it's the tropes of humor that age." She like Robert Benchley and Finley Peter Dunn (who wrote in Irish dialect at turn of the century). As an example of Dunn, she quoted him as having said, "If the American people can govern themselves, they can govern

anything that walks." (This was apparently in regard to the Philippines.)

(Mention of the turn of the century led Willis to say, "I don't see how we can possibly cope with the turn of the century because we have nothing to call it." Personally, I like "The Naughts.")

Resnick recommended John Sladek, Frederic Brown, Henry Kuttner, and William Tenn. Gunn recommended Lesley Black and Harry Harrison's STAR SMASHERS OF THE GALAXY RANGERS. Willis suggested Thomas Disch's "Santa Claus Compromise." Asked about Mark Russell, Resnick said he was just a watered-down Mort Sahl.

One problem humorists have now is what Willis called the battle cry of every group: "That's not funny." (Of course, 90% of the time it's not funny. It's only when someone with the talent of a Willis or a Resnick writes about it that it's funny. And denigrative humor that isn't funny is worse than other types of non-funny humor, in that it makes the "humorist" look bigoted.)

Gunn gave her example of telling ethnic humor: "How many Polish popes does it take to unscrew a pregnant woman?" She had this printed in the college newspaper and someone complained. (What a surprise.) Resnick added, "The Polish pope performed his first miracle: he made a blind man lame."

Resnick closed by saying that humor was an essential element, even in a serious work, and that one can't carry a serious scene more than 1700 words without relieving some tension with humor.

[to be continued] [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
MT 3F-434 908-957-5619
m.r.leeper@att.com

Only one more indispensible massacre of Capitalists
or Communists or Fascists or Christians or Heretics,
and there we are in the Golden Future.
--Aldous Huxley