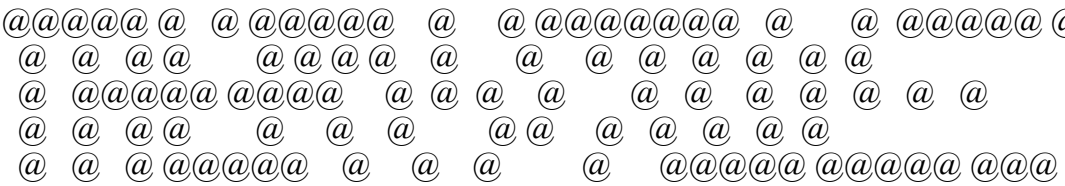

Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
Club Notice - 10/20/95 -- Vol. 14, No. 16

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. Our next discussion book is from the Golden Age of SF, Robert Heinlein's 1942 BEYOND THIS HORIZON. In HEINLEIN IN DIMENSION, Alexei Panshin says, "BEYOND THIS HORIZON ... probably has as much of a Roman candle plot, shooting off in alll directions, as Heinlein ever wrote. However, in spite of all that I have said about ununified plots, it remains one of my two favorite Heinlein stories." The main plot of the story involves a man who is the product of four generations of genetic control and his request that society prove to him he should have children (and continue the

experiment). There's also the portrayal of a libertarian society--to Panshin, this is the main element of the novel--a revolution, an examination of eugenics, a couple of love stories, and so on.

Come join us for a discussion of this classic novel. [-ecl]

==========

2. It seemed like a good idea at the time. Those are the most dour words in the English language according to Jean Shepherd. Whole empires have fallen over things that have seemed like a good idea at the time. It's true. And it wasn't even my idea. Thinking back it was Guy who first used that dreaded acronym to me. "TVP," he said, "You guys ought to try TVP." It sounds like a new cult, like EST. Well let me tell you it's faster than EST. What is TVP? It stands for Textured Vegetable Protein. You make hamburgers out of the stuff but it doesn't come from anything that has ever had a face. It is made from wheat. Well, to be more specific it is made from gluten. What is gluten exactly? Websters defines it as "a tenacious elastic protein substance especially of wheat flour that gives cohesiveness to dough." There you go, it is a protein, so you can probably use it like meat. You can use this tenacious elastic protein substance to make a tenacious elastic protein hamburger. The world has figured out how to make tenacious elastic protein hamburgers without ever involving a living animal. I mean, do we live in a great age or what? Okay, so Guy says we should try the stuff so we do. I mean after all, probably I have had lots of hamburgers that have had vegetable filler with the meat. This just takes that approach to its logical end, eliminating the meat altogether and leaving only the filler. We go looking for it at a health food store. And there it sits on a shelf in a can. Redi-Burger. Now immediately the can and the name make me think that it is created more for the palate of a Cocker Spaniel than a sophisticated Man of the World such as myself. The can says 1/3 less fat than lean ground beef. Hold it. You mean they took out all of the meat and left in 2/3 of the fat? How gauche. So what's in this stuff other than gluten, I wonder. The label says Corn

Oil, Wheat Germ, Dried Yeast... Wait, maybe, I don't want to know. "Easy to serve. Open both ends of the can and press out loaf." I have done that with food before, but not since my dog died. I never expected to be doing this for me. This stuff sounds more and more like woofy chow.

Well, I got the stuff home and the time came to prepare it. This is the final step. The stuff is, in fact, brown and of the exact consistency of hund hash. It is uniform toward the center but the outside edge is liquefied or greasy toward the outside. It reminds me of the first time I fed my dog a can of dog food. He gained a dinner and I lost a lunch. Gawd, what a smell! But I was actually cutting this stuff in slices and putting it in a frying pan. Yeesh.

Okay, so what was the bottom line? If you eat the stuff straight, it clearly is not burger. Put it in a bun, melt some cheese on it

(more fat!), and put a slice of tomato on it and the difference between it and a real burger become less and less obvious or at least less important. Then again the same can probably be said of real dog food. [-mrl]

==========

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

> Capsule: Never have I had a film drop in rating so far so fast. This is a movie with an enthralling first half hour. It offers a fascinating look at society falling apart and technological change that would really transform humanity. But this is a lead-in for a gawd-awful, predictable, cliched murder mystery that almost never uses the premise. Rating: -1 (-4 to +4).

The best science fiction film of the 1980s was the first 2/3 of the film BRAINSTORM. This was an excellent look at how one invention

could transform humanity. The invention was the means to record a person's thoughts and sensory input and to play it back for someone else so the second person has exactly the same experience. The last third of BRAINSTORM shows the signs of rapid rewriting of the script after one of the major actors died. In the world of the film resulting transformation of society could have been the subject of twenty excellent sequels without ever covering the same topic twice. For a while watching STRANGE DAYS I thought I was seeing the first of those sequels and it was great. But the feeling just did not last.

Lenny Nero (played by Ralph Fiennes) traffics in contraband experience, recorded on little CD-ROMs and capable of being played back. If you want the experience of making love to a beautiful woman or of committing a violent crime, you can buy it from Lenny and play it back as often as you like, repeating it over and over. If you have no legs and miss the experience of running on the beach, as long as some human can have the experience, you can also. As Lenny says, "This isn't 'television, only better'" This is the real thing. The only problem is the technology and materials are illegal. People record their experiences and sell them to Lenny who sells them to other people. Lenny has a bag full of contraband experiences (not unlike the handkerchief full of souls in "The Devil and Daniel Webster"). He plies his trade in the netherworld of a disintegrating Los Angeles. So what do writers James Cameron and Jay Cocks do with the idea? One of these little experience CD-ROMs has a recording of an experience that some people would like hushed up and others would want to make public. Full stop on the ideas. Now we have high-energy chases, sex scenes, martial

arts fights, gunplay, shocking revelations, rock music performances, smashing windshields, graphic rapes, betrayals, murders, cover-ups, and a totally daffy ending with several progressively sillier climaxes. Not surprisingly Los Angeles is much like today, only worse, in the last days of the second-to-last year of this century. (Yes, the second-to-last. Cameron and Cox seem to think that in spite of the fact that the first millennium started with the year 1 and the second one started with the year 1001, for some reason we will start the third one in the year 2000. We won't.)

Ralph Fiennes and Tom Sizemore are fairly good as low-life heroes, and what is cyberpunk without its low-life heroes? Angela Bassett is not quite up to a role that calls for her to have both the natural wisdom of a Solomon and the martial arts skills of a Chuck Norris. It isn't her fault, but the script falls just short of implying she can walk on water. Juliette Lewis show more flesh than acting talent as an old girlfriend of Lenny's.

The style of the film is fast-paced and will certainly be hard for some audiences to follow, at least in the earlier, more interesting parts of the film. The editing is fast, but not always skillful. Occasionally it borders on the confusing, but this is supposed to be a bewildering future. Katheryn Bigelow directs it with some of the same style she used in TV's WILD PALMS. That film was three hours and seemed longer; this one is nearly two-and-a-half hours and seems just as long.

This is a film that builds something intriguing and interesting and then spoils it all in the last hour and fifty minutes. The real problem is that STRANGE DAYS tries to be an action film, a martial arts film, a film about race, and a science fiction film while using a plot that with minor substitutions would be a cable-bait mystery. I wonder if the nearness of the time-setting of this film will get 20th Century Fox thinking about the fact they soon need a new name for their studio. Then again, with disappointments like this one, maybe they won't. In spite of a great start, this one gets a high -1 on the -4 to +4 scale. At one point I thought it might get a +3. [-mrl]

==========

4. LIVING IN OBLIVION (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

> Capsule: This is an occasionally amusing look at the problems a director faces to get a few scenes shot. The film is somewhat educational about the process of making films, how it is done and what can go wrong, but ultimately the film falls a little flat and feels like an

exercise in petulance. The problems themselves, if not the density of their occurrence, are believable but they are not enough to carry the film. Rating: 0 (-4 to +4).

Are you in an easy job? Probably not. I know my job isn't simple. I have to be diplomatic at times, I have frustrations, people I deal with make mistakes. In fact, my job seems a lot like that of director Nick Reve (played by Steve Buscemi) in LIVING IN OBLIVION. This is less a story than a catalog with dramatization of the problems a director faces getting three scenes shot for a film called LIVING IN OBLIVION. The name "Reve" means dream but Nick's life is anything but a dream. The problems Nick faces with assistants who have their mind on other things, equipment that fails or that nobody on set knows how to use are driving him into hysteria. The film is nearly plotless, as for most of the film the viewer sits on the shooting stage like a fly on the wall and watches what happens.

What the viewer does see is an incredible number of foul-ups, personality clashes, and accidents. Nick has to act as confessor, mediator, diplomat, counselor, and general seer. We are presented an unending chain of weirdos, people with chips on their shoulder, and people who think they can do Nick's job better. It is easy to believe each of the problems that Nick faces; it just stretches the credibility to say he faces all these problems just filming three scenes. Admittedly one expects more problems working on a low-budget film with cheap equipment and with fewer assistants than on a big Hollywood production. Still, it is hard to believe that this day is typical. There is internal evidence in the film that this really is not all happening in a single day. But that is not clear due to logic holes in the script by writer/director Don DiCillo that I will discuss in a spoiler section after the review.

There is a good deal of discussion of the different production methods that have to be used in low budget independent films and in polished but empty Hollywood productions people on set refer to as "Hostess Twinkie films." But again the sort of problems faced in making the independent film cannot be all that different from problems in any small semi-technical operation.

Steve Buscemi is a good actor and one of those actors who appeal to low-budget, independent, cult directors much as John Turturro does. One will nearly always see him somewhere in a film by Quentin Tarantino or the Coen Brothers. Not as familiar are Catherine Keener as an insecure actress who is all too easily crushed by any criticism at all and James LeGros as a supremely egocentric but untalented actor. The two actors, have slept together the night previous to the shooting and have a comic battle of wills on the set.

The photography makes good use of both monochrome and color photography, though it is not consistent as to where it uses each. As films about the making of films go, this one is certainly one of the most informative. It suffers from its limited scope and an insufficient number of different things to go wrong to keep the audience amused. In the end the viewer has been edified more than satisfied. Give this movie a rating of 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.

Spoiler...Spoiler...Spoiler...Spoiler...

Dreams are very important in this film. There are three sequences, two of which turn out to be dreams and a third is the filming of a dream sequence. As I pointed out above, Nick's last name is French for "dream." Tito criticizes Nick for not understanding how dreams work, but DiCillo does not seem to understand any better. I believe (but am willing to be corrected) that dreams are always from a subjective point of view. In sequences that turn out to be dreams, characters see themselves as another person. A dream would always be from the inside of the person dreaming looking out. I think it is also very unlikely for a person to dream a scene where he or she is not present. Perhaps someone who know a little more about the psychology of dreaming can tell me if these two assumptions are correct. They are certainly true of all my own dreams that I remember. Things that happen in dreams seem to carry over to the filming of the third sequence, which is apparently not supposed to be a dream. For example, Wolf's eye is injured in one dream, but that seems to be carried on to other sequences. My suspicion is that at some point the first two sequences were not originally written as dreams and the script was patched to say they were dreams at a later point. [-mrl]

==========

5. Intersection 1995 (a convention report by Evelyn C. Leeper) (part 5 of 6 parts):

Can We Take Popular Science Seriously?
(The Abuses of Popular Science)

Sunday, 12:00
Caroline Mullan (m), Steve Brewster,
Christine Carmichael, Daniel Marcus

"An enquiry into the uses and abuses of popular science."

Mullan brought a lot of books which she stacked up as examples of popular science books. Some were mentioned during the talk, but as best as I could tell, the stack included:

- THE COLLAPSE OF CHAOS by Jack Cohen and Ian Stewart

- WHAT DO YOU CARE WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THINK? by Richard Feynman
- CHAOS by James Gleick
- EIGHT LITTLE PIGGIES by Stephen Jay Gould
- THE TANGLED WING by Melvin Konner
- FUZZY LOGIC by Dan McNeill
- THE DESCENT OF THE CHILD by Elaine Morgan
- MIND TOOLS by Rudy Rucker
- THE DENSITY OF LIFE by Edward O. Wilson

Brewster began by saying that he reads popular science for the sense of wonder it gives him rather, and finds it better in this regard than most science fiction. He specifically mentioned Daniel Dennett's CONSCIOUSNESS EXPLAINED. (Dennett has also written THE MIND'S EYE with Douglas Hofstadter.) Mullan asked if Dennett actually intended to induce a sense of wonder, but I'm not sure that's a fair question in judging the reader's reaction.

Mullan said she reads popular science as a way to keep up with science without reading dense material that one may not have time for. Marcus said that this could be dangerous, and holding up Gleick's CHAOS, said, "This book detracts from the sum of human knowledge." Why? Because it has spawned a non-rigorous treatment of the subject in the media, resulting in what Marcus termed a "chain of distorted reflections."

Mullan noted that at least science fiction says it's fiction, while the non-fiction treatments masquerade as truth. From the audience, Anita Cole asked, "What book on chaos theory would you recommend?"

Marcus suggested ORDER AND CHAOS by Boullet and two others whose names I didn't get (and I couldn't find any reference to this in BOOKS IN PRINT), and then added Stephen H. Kellert's IN THE WAKE OF CHAOS, which starts out, "Chaos theory is not as interesting as it sounds. How could it be?"

Carmichael recommended SCIENCE or NATURE magazines, and also THE NEW SCIENTIST.

Someone in the audience asked why there are so many popular science books now. Catherine Kerrigan, also in the audience said it was due in large part to the success of Stephen Hawking's book, and to various political attempts (at least in the United Kingdom) to promote science.

Carmichael says that one way to keep up is to look for review articles of the books in journals, since they often summarize the book. Marcus said that the review articles cover the information, but don't entertain the way the books can. Mullan added that the problem was also to know which reviews to read; Marcus said the trick was to read the reviews in the specialized journals.

Carmichael also suggested just picking up the book and reading a page at random to see if it is what you're looking for.

From the audience, Kerrigan reminded the panelists that popular science is written for people who are not trained scientists, not for the panelists, most of whom *were* trained scientists.

Asked for specific recommendations, Marcus said James Trefil is a good popular science writer. Mullan said that although Jered M. Diamond's THE THIRD CHIMPANZEE: THE EVOLUTION & FUTURE OF THE HUMAN ANIMAL, which purported to be an examination of the evolutionary history of mankind, was well-received, it never showed a link between the evolutionary theory and the current state of mankind. Brewster compared it to THE BELL CURVE in that it shows that what is needed is a popular science book on statistics, correlation vs. causality, false positives and negatives, and so

on. (Someone in the audience suggested that John Allen Paulos's INNUMERACY fit this description.)

Someone in the audience suggested that there are two types of pop sci books: one by the popular science writer who is trying to inform, and one by scientists pursuing their own agenda and trying to make a name for themselves. Brewster agreed, but said the latter was not necessarily an absolute obstacle. For example, Roger Penrose's EMPEROR'S NEW MIND was a splendid book in spite of being wrong, but then again, Penrose made clear it was his own agenda. Carmichael said she actually prefers when the author does have an opinion (e.g., Paul Davies). Mullan gave the example of FUZZY LOGIC, which has a political agenda vis-a-vis why the Japanese have used it

Someone in the audience complained that we concentrate on the glamorous stuff and forget to teach the basics.

I asked for the panelists' opinions of Asimov as a popular science writer. Carmichael said it would be difficult for many of the panelists to answer, since Asimov's science writing was (and is) not generally available in the United Kingdom.

Marcus summed up the panel by asking, "What good does good science writing do?" and then answering, "It inspires young people to go into science."

High Tech Meets Low Tech
Sunday, 13:00
Sam Lundwall (m), Brian Aldiss, Gwyneth Jones,
Ian McDonald, Jaroslav Olsa

"Is contemporary SF/F relevant to the 'pre-industrialized' world, and vice versa? Can the Third World be portrayed by First World writers without being exploited? Why do so few writers include the Third World in their work--lack of knowledge of the subject, a perceived unattractiveness of the subject, or is the low-tech subject simply at odds with a high-tech genre?"

Aldiss started by asking who invented the term "Third World"? Was it Tito or Nehru? No one really answered this, and that's because it was neither; it was G. Balandier in 1956, who said, "La conference tenue a Bandoeng en avril 1955, par les delegues de vingt-neuf nations asiatiques et africaines ... manifeste l'acces, au premier plan de la scene politique internationale, de ces peuples qui constituent un "Tiers Monde" entre les deux 'blocs,' selon l'expression d'A. Sauvy." (This according to the OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY, which has other references if you want to look it up. I will not type them in from that teeny-tiny type! Neither will I attempt to get all the accent marks correct, since I could barely see the letters!)

In any case, Aldiss pointed out the term was misleading, since it implied some commonality to the Third World, which is actually much more "miscellaneous" and diverse than the First or Second Worlds. Aldiss also observed, "Life may be pretty tough in the Third World, but the people there appear to be, if not more happy, then at least more tranquil than we are in the West." He attributes this to the caste system in India, for example. There is no struggle to improve.

Olsa agreed, and said Singapore is successful precisely because it is not a democracy. (This led to a fixation on Singapore that ran through the whole hour and seemed to replace any discussion of the Third World in science fiction.)

Jones said there is a decline in the use of the term "Third World," and that it is being replaced by the term "the developing world."

McDonald said that by any workable definition, Belfast is part of the Third World, with its politics, violence, unemployment, etc. Just as streets in Los Angeles are showing "signs of spontaneous malling" in the words of some commentator, other areas show "signs of spontaneous Third World-ing." The division of the planet into First, Second, and Third Worlds is not a simple map; it's more of a fractal pattern. But McDonald agreed with part of what Aldiss said, saying that the lives of the have-nots seem to be richer and more energetic than those of the haves. (Aldiss noted here that

this is true of people "outside the system" in general; science fiction conventions are more vibrant than anything Iris Murdoch ever goes to.)

Aldiss returned (metaphorically) to Singapore, saying it is a city of the future, and that we mustn't sentimentalize about some of these places. "These places ruled by dictators with rods of iron can be good places to live." Olsa reported that in Singapore, chewing gum is produced and sold by the underground like drugs (so prohibiting things doesn't necessarily work). Lundwall describes Singapore as a trade-off of giving up freedom for security. (Benjamin Franklin's ghost hovered over me, whispering, "They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety." I suggested he talk to the panel, but he wasn't listening.)

Jones said that the Third World can show First World characteristics; Elizabeth Hand writes about Indonesia as the last great imperialist nation. And the panelists agreed that such changes as the Internet may have a major effect: it is hard to enter the Internet without giving up the control of information that such societies seem to require.

Someone on the panel suggested that Singapore was an attempt to apply Western concepts in a Third World context.

The panelists were asked where Third World countries are going. Jones said she was not qualified to predict. McDonald said that the question was from a First World perspective, just as Singapore is a First World fantasy city.

From the audience, Chris Higgins asked if the First World needs a Third World. McDonald hinted that to some extent he would be addressing this in his upcoming book about aliens giving the Third World alien nanotech.

Someone in the audience asked why there were no panelists from the Third World. Olsa said that while the First World's science fiction had reached the Third World--he had just seen a Batman T-shirt in Kigali (Rwanda)--science fiction requires a middle-class that thinks about the future. McDonald expressed it differently: "Science fiction is the mythology of developed nations."

David Zink noted that the First, Second, and Third Worlds are not permanent arrangements; China and Egypt used to be the First World. This led John Sloan to ask about the results in China of a whole

generation of "only children," most of whom are male. Will this lead to an increased level of violence? Or will there just be, as someone suggested, a rise in mail-order brides? One of the panelists suggested that there was a similar imbalance in Europe after World War I.

Jones actually returned to the topic to ask how science fiction treats the Third World, and to answer by saying, "We talk about them as if they don't exist." She noted that when Arthur C. Clarke wrote CHILDHOOD'S END, his description of the race problem in South Africa focused on the "persecuted whites."

I was disappointed that the panelists didn't talk more about writing science fiction set in the Third World, since that what I particularly like about McDonald's and Jones's writing. The hour was very disconnected in that when someone asked a question, one panelist would answer it, then go back to the audience without letting the others answer it.

After this, we went to lunch with Kate and Barbara at Molinare's, the restaurant upstairs at the SECC. It was priced about the same as restaurants in town, and I was getting tired of fast food and wanted to sit down.

Alternate Histories: Turning Points
Sunday, 17:00
Evelyn Leeper (m), Michael F. Flynn, Kim Newman,
Herman Ritter, Harry Turtledove

"The 'tide of history' vs the 'great man' theories."

[Thanks to Mark for taking notes, especially since I asked him at the last minute after my tape recorder wouldn't work.]

I started by asking everyone in the audience to turn off their cellular phones and alarm watches--as i said earlier, some guy had a phone that kept ringing during panels.

I started by asking the panelists to comment on the dichotomy between the Great Man-Capitalism-Free Will-Aristocracy Theory and the Tide of History-Marxism-Determinism-Democracy Theory. Most said that they generally believed in the Tide of History, though there was room for the effects of individuals as well. Flynn pointed out that as long as authors are stuck making stories out of history, they will probably use the Great Man Theory even if they don't completely agree with it.

Newman expressed his feelings by saying that aside from agreeing with Turtledove on the Great Man versus the Tide of History, every now and then there is a fulcrum where history will be radically altered. For example, if someone else had been President he would have handled Reconstruction better than Andrew Johnson did. When we talk about changing history, what do we really mean about that? Maybe if things had gone differently, we would be living in Cabotland but things would still be similar.

Leeper said that she was reminded of a line from Tom Stoppard's play TRAVESTIES, in which a character expressed Marx's belief in the Tide of History by quoting Marx as saying, "I believe if Lenin had not existed, it would not have been necessary to invent him."

The panel talked a bit about history itself as a character, Leeper mentioned that Kim Stanley Robinson has done that, with such stories as "A Sensitive Dependence on Initial Conditions" (about the bombing of Hiroshima), "Remaking History" (about faking the Viking discovery of America), and "A History of the Twentieth Century (with Pictures)" (about how to look at history).

Leeper asked the panelists, "What makes alternate history believable, what makes it good, and are they the same?"

Turtledove said that alternate history doesn't have to be believable to be good; there can be a "gonzo" story that was still good. In any case, we do not write about alternate worlds, we write about our world, and alternate history gives us a different mirror. Turtledove said his story "The Last Article" was set in a post-World War II in which Germany was victorious. Set in India, it looked at a situation in which Gandhi's civil disobedience was

likely to fail. It is looking more at the limits of civil disobedience that the specific alternate history.

Leeper asked Ritter if he as an historian saw things differently. Ritter replied that utopias and dystopias also show the world in distorted ways. Historical fiction is bound to some worlds, but you can throw in all sorts of silly things as well. (Leeper joked that nobody would throw in alien invaders, though.)

Flynn said you can't write alternate history unless you are holding up some sort of mirror. World War II is popular as a base because our parents and grandparents lived through it.

Flynn added that it is possible to write alternate history with no science fiction content. Turtledove responded, "There is a 'but' to that." Even though you are not talking about science, there is still the theory that every decision "splits" the universe. Flynn suggested that E. L. Doctorow's RAGTIME was an example of an alternate history that did nothing with science. Ritter disagreed, saying, "I think history is a science," and Flynn said that in the 1950's the big hip science was geography.

Newman agreed that not all alternate history was science fiction. For example, his ANNO DRACULA, having a vampire marry Queen Victoria, would not be science fiction--it would be fantasy.

Leeper mentioned one problem with making alternate histories believable is that if a story takes into account how much things would change, it will be completely unfamiliar. For example,

Robert Silverberg's "Via Roma" takes place about our century after a change back more than 2000 years ago. There is no similarity to our world. "He did a good job of realizing everything would be very different, but it was so different I did not like it," bemoaned Leeper.

Newman said that he found the most irritating alternate history is that Rome did not fall, and everything is the same centuries later. Flynn said that is a stasis society. Leeper noted there was one like that in which Jesus wasn't crucified, but Turtledove noted in

the specific three-book series they were all talking about, there were two changes: Rome defeated Arminius in the Teutoburg Wald, and twenty years later Jesus was not crucified. (Well, actually he was not crucified any of the other years either.) To be fair, the author did connect these two changes, but he assumed that after this, nothing would change for centuries.

Flynn pointed out that if you start making changes, all sorts of people would not be born; even if their parents did meet they would have a different child. Turtledove said that sometimes he would have an historical personage existing where he shouldn't, but he knows he's cheating. Flynn said while the child might be different, the parents could well give him the same name. Leeper mentioned Howard Waldrop's "Ike at the Mike," which does things entirely differently but is not an alternate history in the classic sense. What makes things really unbelievable is, for example, if six people come along and destroy Rome. Turtledove mentioned that something like that occurs in Poul Anderson's HIGH CRUSADE, but even that is more believable, and oddly enough, in the end does touch on alternate history.

In any case, things have effects. If you change history, none of the same people born. If World War II doesn't happen, but you have John Kennedy become President anyway, you had better explain how. Ritter said he thought all the Kennedy brothers were fascinating, and any of them could have been President.

Ritter also said that although changes in World War II are a very popular subject for alternate histories, there are no more than five German works about such changes. Leeper asked if this was due to any restrictions in Germany on what can be published about the Nazis; for example, can someone write an alternate history in which Nazi Germany wins? Ritter said yes; there was one such book, and it was banned, and there was such an uproar that it was allowed. There were problems with Norman Spinrad's IRON DREAM in that the original cover had a swastika, which *is* banned, but when that was removed, the book was published with no problem.

Turtledove commented that given all the material about World War II, he was surprised there weren't more such stories in Germany. Flynn noted the same phenomenon in the United States; we don't

write alternate histories about wars we lost. Leeper said that she believed one reason was that the most famous such war, the Vietnam War, was too recent and too many people find it too painful (she knew someone who wouldn't go to see MISS SAIGON because he found the reminders too painful), With World War II, while veterans are still alive, it was long enough ago to dull the bad memories, and after all, the United States did win. As far as the Korean War goes, no one remembers it and alternate histories about it would be met by puzzled looks by most readers. Also, Flynn said with the Korean War you would have to have one side or the other win, instead of a stalemate. And the War of 1812 is another one no one remembers which, if the United States didn't lose, they at least didn't win: having your capital burned doesn't really constitute a victory. (And the best known battle of the war, which the United States did win, was fought *after* the war was over.)

Turtledove said that part of what makes a change point good is not only that they are relevant, but that there is a story that the author can write as well. Flynn agreed, saying that is interesting to think of a Europe with five more geniuses like Freud, but then you have to write that. Newman said it's even more difficult if you choose to try to write about something happening that didn't happen in our world. Leeper said this tied in with Ritter's comments Saturday on cliometrics, and asked him to repeat them. Basically, Ritter said, you can only subtract out data, you cannot add it, so cliometricians say the only thing that is interesting is subtracting. Newman said all this implies the use of numbers, but thought this could be done without.

Newman suggested that an important factor, for example, was the proportion of people traveling; this will determine how fast an idea spreads. For example, adding a bunch of soldiers moving around will result in a ferment of ideas, not a static society.

Leeper agreed with Turtledove that the problem was in making the change interesting, and that to some extent requires not treading the same ground as everyone else. She asked what change points have not been overused that panelists think would be promising.

Turtledove suggested that having the Romans win at Teutoburg Wald and then romanize Germany seemed like a critical change point to him. (Although this was done, albeit badly, in the series mentioned earlier.) Ritter suggested that if in the 1845 vote about making Austria part of Germany. the Austrians had not voted against their own proposal, but instead had voted to join Germany, that would have greatly changed European politics.

Flynn said his mind toward trivia: what if Fatty Arbuckle did not go to that party? Who would have had better careers? Flynn suggested Louise Brooks. He said that Mae West wouldn't have made it, since she relied on being just on the edge of the Hayes Code.

Newman said he tried to come up with something off the wall, and while everybody does World War II, the American Revolutionary War doesn't get much play, and World War I is almost forgotten. He suggested von Gluck's turn not happening, or the Second Dynasty in Egypt not breaking down. What if Pharaohs had not able to unify, and the Nubian Kingdom had started a thousand years earlier? (The only (von) Gluck I can find is the composer who had a great effect on opera, but from context, I would have thought von Gluck was a military figure.)

Leeper said an alternate history she would like to see would be what Christianity would have been like without St. Paul. As she expressed it, "What if more followed what Jesus said, instead of Paul's interpretation of it?" (One she didn't have a chance to mention was what if the British had known that Jiddah, the leading force for partition of India, had tuberculosis and would die soon. One speculation is that they might have delayed the decision until he was dead, and people would have decided to keep India together instead of splitting into India and Pakistan. See page 109-111 of Larry Collins and Dominque Lapierre's FREEDOM AT MIDNIGHT--or at least those are the page numbers in my edition.)

Someone in the audience, responding to an earlier comment, said that it used to be true that for ideas to travel, people had to travel, but now was that still true? Leeper suggested that modern communications could be looked on as "out-of-body" travel.

Someone asked whether the break-up of the Soviet empire would inspire more alternate histories. Turtledove said that this may be what's inspiring all the stories of Hitler winning, and then seventy-five years after the war Fascism starting to break up. Flynn said that the end of the Cold War will cause some, and old spy stories will come up as well. (Leeper mentioned Norman Spinrad's RUSSIAN SPRING as an "instant" alternate history: near-future science fiction when he wrote it, but by the time it was published it was alternate history.)

Leeper asked for last thoughts. Newman said he thought of another example of projecting different past from what didn't happen but could have: using Hiero's steam engine as a Roman catapult. Flynn

said that because alternate history which has grown out of science fiction, it tends to dwell on technology; he would like to look at political fields or religion, Leeper agreed, saying that she likes to read alternate histories that look at social change, and particularly at religion. History is after all trying to change the future the way we want it, which is the whole idea of Flynn's IN THE COUNTRY OF THE BLIND.

Ritter thought that it used to take longer to write an effective alternate history in the sense of waiting until after a given event. Where before it took a generation to assimilate and collect

the information about something, now information flows so fast that it may take only five or ten years. This led Flynn to ask about real people suing writers for portraying them in alternate histories; Ritter responded that Hermann Goering filed a lawsuit against a writer for doing this.

Turtledove summed up a lot of people's feeling when he said, "A friend once described alternate history as the most fun you have with your clothes on."

The Fan in The High Castle
Sunday, 17:00

"Fandoms of If. How changes in history and technology would have affected fandom.... And what about changes purely internal to fandom itself?"

Well, fandom might have become smart enough *not* to schedule this opposite the literary track's alternate history panel.

Hugo Awards
Sunday, 19:15 (20:00)
Diane Duane and Peter Morwood, Toastmasters

Summary: Nothing went amazingly wrong, and many of the awards were predictable.

But before the detailed commentary, the awards:

- Best Novel: MIRROR DANCE by Lois McMaster Bujold
- Best Novella: "Seven Views of Olduvai Gorge" by Mike Resnick
- Best Novelette: "The Martian Child" by David Gerrold
- Best Short Story: "None So Blind" by Joe Haldeman
- Best Non-fiction Book: I. ASIMOV: A MEMOIR by Isaac Asimov
- Best Dramatic Presentation: "All Good Things" (STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION)
- Best Professional Editor: Gardner Dozois
- Best Professional Artist: Jim Burns
- Best Professional Artwork: LADY COTTINGTON'S PRESSED FAIRY BOOK by Brian Froud & Terry Jones
- Best Semiprozine: INTERZONE edited by David Pringle
- Best Fanzine: ANSIBLE edited by Dave Langford
- Best Fan Writer: Dave Langford
- Best Fan Artist: Teddy Harvia
- John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer: Jeff Noon
- E. Everett Evans Big Heart Award: Kenneth F. Slater
- First Fandom Awards: Jack Speer and Harry Warner, Jr.

There were also the Seiun Awards for works in translation: novel for HYPERION by Dan Simmons, and short story for "A Planet Named Shayol" by Cordwainer Smith.

The ceremonies began with Robert Silverberg giving a moving eulogy for John Brunner, at the end of which he asked, not for a moment of silence, but for a standing ovation for Brunner. After this, Duane's and Morwood's opening humor fell somewhat flat, though I'm not convinced it wouldn't have done so anyway. (Or maybe it's just not to my taste.)

The awards went without a hitch. Langford's two wins were predictable, INTERZONE's somewhat less so, but that was one I was pleased to see. I think INTERZONE is doing some of the best and most interesting fiction around, but it doesn't stand much chance at a North American Worldcon, with only 250 North American

subscribers. Best Nonfiction was another predictable one.

(Langford's win were so predictable that I didn't bother to bring my tuxedo. I had no desire to cart it all over Britain for a month when I wasn't even going to be on stage. I did bring a dressy jacket and bow tie however.)

The business meeting earlier voted to eliminate the Best Professional Artwork category; this needs to be ratified by L.A.Con III next year before it actually happens.

It was nice to see yet another artist win the Best Professional Artist Hugo; now if only the Best Professional Editor Hugo would start moving around to some of the other deserving candidates. Dozois is very good, but I don't think he's the best every year.

The less said about Best Dramatic Presentation the better. I voted all the candidates other than INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE below "No Award."

Mike Resnick was the first person to be nominated for four Hugos in a single year, but missed being the first person to *lose* four Hugos in a single night. He is now tied with Ursula K. LeGuin, who also lost three Hugos, and Connie Willis, who lost three Hugos in 1992. [Mike Resnick later pointed out to me that Orson Scott Card and Robert Silverberg also each lost three Hugos in a single night.]

Michael Bishop has now had ten Hugo nominations without a win, the current record. However, he still has a ways to go to beat Robert Silverberg, who had a string of sixteen nominations without a win (although Silverberg had won a Hugo previous to the string).

The only major problem from the point of view of the participants was that they didn't give us any directions: which side of the

stage the winner should walk up, how they should exit the stage, and so on.

The Hugo ceremonies were over by 10 PM. For a change they asked

all the nominees to gather on the stage for photographs before having photographs of just the winners. (I suspect the low percentage of nominees attending made this possible; one could normally expect about sixty nominees, but there were probably only about half that there.) That they wanted everyone there was also not announced beforehand.

We then proceeded to the:

Hugo Losers Party
Sunday, 10 PM

Okay, it's officially called the "Hugo Nominees Party," but all the nominees call it the "Hugo Losers Party." I suppose one should not look a gift horse in the mouth, but this is the first HLP in six years that had a cash bar. Yes, I know things are done differently in Britain, but to throw a party with the nominees as your guests and then to ask them to pay for their drinks (including soft drinks) seems, well, just a bit tacky. The nominee souvenirs were travel flashlights (oops, this is Britain, so they were torches).

It was claimed that we would be able to see the fireworks from the HLP, and this was true if you were willing to sit on the floor directly under the window and practically under the buffet table. Someone had failed to take into account the awning, which blocked most of the view.

There was some food (for which we did not have to pay), but it was pretty heavy for that late: chicken drumettes, samosa, and donner kebab. For vegetarians or anyone avoiding fat, there was nothing. Maybe I'm out of step with what everyone else wants, but fruit, crackers (biscuits here), cheese, and raw vegetables are much more appealing to me.

We left about 11 PM, when it got too crowded to move around at all. Going towards the taxi rank, we saw two women standing to one side and discovered they were waiting for the city bus which ran from the SECC to the Marriott for 30p (a lot cheaper than the L1 convention shuttle). So we waited with them and took that. Why didn't the committee tell us about this city bus?

[to be continued] [-ecl]

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