

7PM, our Leeperhouse Fest should be:

THE MT VOID

Page 2

ASIAN ADVENTURE

HIGH ROAD TO CHINA (1983) dir. by Brian G. Hutton

THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING (1975) dir. by John Huston

I have yet to hear of one established critic who liked H_i_g_h_R_o_a_d_t_o_C_h_i_n_a but I have yet to find any personal acquaintance who saw the film and didn't enjoy it a lot. I think some people were expecting it to be a R_a_i_d_e_r_s_o_f_t_h_e_L_o_s_t_A_r_k and instead got a more traditional but good high adventure film. I think H_i_g_h_R_o_a_d has a good script and is a great deal of fun. It takes place in the Roaring 20s and is the story of an heiress's chase from Egypt to China, via biplane, to find her missing adventurer father before his business partners steal the company. The heiress enlists the aid of of a world-weary WW I flying ace. We have shown H_i_g_h_R_o_a_d once already, but I want to see it again. The film stars Tom Selleck, Bess Armstrong, Jack Weston, Wilford Brimley, Robert Morley, and Brian Blessed. The score is by John Barry.

We will save for second one of the great adventure adventure films. Sean Connery and Michael Caine star in what I consider to be each's best film ever, John Huston's T_h_e_M_a_n_W_h_o_W_o_u_l_d_B_e_K_i_n_g. It was great when Kipling wrote it and it may even be better in this screen adaptation. Two adventurers leave the British army in India and set out to make themselves the kings of Kafiristan. The story is a great parable about pride and ambition, but just taken literally it is a great story. In supporting roles are Christopher Plummer as Rudyard Kipling and Saeed Jaffrey. The musical score by Maurice Jarre is also considered classic.

2. If anyone recorded "Prisoner of Gravity" on New Jersey public television on October 16, 23, or 30, and still has the tape, could

I borrow it? (A power failure during our vacation resulted in our not getting most of what we set up to record.) Send e-mail to ecl@mtgpfsl.att.com or call me at 908-957-2070 if you can help.
[-ecl]

Mark Leeper
MT 3D-441 908-957-5619
leeper@mtgzfs3.att.com

An invasion of armies can be resisted; an invasion of ideas cannot be resisted.

-- Victor Hugo

ConFrancisco 1993
Con report by Evelyn C. Leeper
Copyright 1993 Evelyn C. Leeper

(Part 5 of 5)

Panel: MMMMaaaarrrrkkkk TTTTwwwwaaaaiiiinnnn aaaassss aaaa CCCChhhhaaaarrrrraaaacccctttteeerrrr
iiiiinnnn SSSScccciiiiieennnnccceeeeee FFFFiiiiiccccttttiiioooonnnn

Sunday, 4:00 PM

Mark Twain, Jody Lynn Nye, Hayford Peirce, Bruce Holland Rogers (m)

"Twain has been a major character in many SF/F stories. Why? What are the advantages and disadvantages of using a well-known person in fiction?": The advantages are somewhat obvious. The author has a ready-made character, with a background that the reader already knows, and does not have to do any of the work of filling that character in. The disadvantages are perhaps less obvious. With many characters, the reader will have pre-conceived notions that are at odds either with history or with what the writer wants the reader to think about the character. The example given here was Richard III, who was nowhere near as evil as Shakespeare and others

portrayed him, but that image has become so firmly fixed in people's minds that using him a_u_t_h_e_n_t_i_c_a_l_l_y will probably not ring true with the reader. Also, in fiction one cannot always stick strictly to the truth about a historical character, especially if one wants him or her to interact with fictional characters. So authors must change some details, and picky readers (such as myself, I admit) often object to this. Both of these relate to how one deals with "the history we know that just isn't so." If everyone believes George Washington chopped down a cherry tree and then told his father he could not tell a lie, does an author write that, or does he write what really happened (assuming that anything even remotely similar to this did occur)? Robert Silverberg in U_p_t_h_e_L_i_n_e has a bit of fun with this, when some of his characters go back to hear someone deliver a very pious line at the dedication of a Hagia Sophia and instead hear him swear most colorfully at whoever left the scaffolding up by mistake.

One way to use real people without changing details is to use the "missing periods" in their lives. For example, one panelist suggested using the period of ten days that Agatha Christie was missing in a story if you want to use Christie, because no one can say that she was doing something else instead of what you say. (Well, if you have her fly to Mars, they may object.)

Another disadvantage, especially in writing about current figures, is that the references may be transitory, or local. A reference to Jesse Helms may be meaningful in the United States now, but it's not going to go very far in Europe now, or probably even in the United States in twenty years. And references to people in the entertainment media can be even more transitory. Would having

ConFrancisco

September 6, 1993

Page 2

Marlene Dietrich as a character in a story do much for the average reader under the age of thirty?

Regarding Twain, at any rate, one panelist (not Mr. Twain) said that using Twain as a character at least guaranteed good dialogue. Of course, it also guarantees cliches--Mark Twain as a character in a novel will say all the things that everyone knows Mark Twain said. Using Oscar Wilde as a character has the same benefit, and the same drawback. If the reader k_n_o_w_s when Twain (or Wilde) said a

particular thing, then reading him saying it at some other occasion entirely is particularly jarring.

Of course, one reason we see Twain and Wilde and others literary figures as characters is that authors like to write about authors. John Kendrick Bangs used Twain in T_h_e_L_i_t_e_r_a_r_y_G_u_i_l_l_o_t_i_n_e and also wrote A_H_o_u_s_e_b_o_a_t_o_n_t_h_e_S_t_y_x, a precursor to Philip Jose Farmer's R_i_v_e_r_w_o_r_l_d, which also used Twain. Twain (and others) remain popular as characters, according to Nye, because the author (and the reader) needs a "larger-than-life character, one who leaves larger-than-life footprints."

Historical personages as characters can get tiresome. Ellen Datlow has said that she never wants to see another story with a famous person as a character unless it's written by Howard Waldrop, and I have a similar feeling about all those Sherlock Holmes pastiches in which Holmes has to meet Teddy Roosevelt, or Sigmund Freud, or Lenin, or whoever. Still, it's possible to do a story with a famous person as a character well even if you're not Howard Waldrop, and so you should probably take this as a caution rather than an outright ban. It would help if people wouldn't always pick the s_a_m_e historical people to write about.

Of course, with alternate histories or time travel stories it's very easy to use historical figures. But you need something besides the gimmick of the person to make the story work.

HHHHuuuuggggooooo (((((aaaannnnndddd OOOOtttthhhheeeerrrr)))))) AAAAwwwaaaarrrrrdddddssss
CCCCeeeeeerrreeemmmmmooooonnnnyyyy
Sunday, 8:00 PM

And the winners are:

- Novel: A_F_i_r_e_U_p_o_n_t_h_e_D_e_e_p by Vernor Vinge (Tor) and D_o_o_m_s_d_a_y B_o_o_k by Connie Willis (Bantam) (tie)
- Novella: "Barnacle Bill the Spacer" by Lucius Shepard (A_s_i_m_o_v'_s July)
- Novelette: "The Nutcracker Coup" by Janet Kagan (A_s_i_m_o_v'_s Dec)
- Short Story: "Even the Queen" by Connie Willis (A_s_i_m_o_v'_s Apr)
- Non-Fiction Book: A_W_e_a_l_t_h_o_f_F_a_b_l_e: A_n_i_n_f_o_r_m_a_l_h_i_s_t_o_r_y_o_f s_c_i_e_n_c_e_f_i_c_t_i_o_n_f_a_n_d_o_m_i_n_t_h_e_1_9_5_0_s by Harry Warner, Jr. (SCIFI)

- Dramatic Presentation: "The Inner Light" (S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k: _T_h_e_N_e_x_t_G_e_n_e_r_a_t_i_o_n) (Paramount Television)
- Professional Editor: Gardner Dozois (A_s_i_m_o_v'_s, various anthologies)
- Professional Artist: Don Maitz
- Original Artwork: D_i_n_o_t_o_p_i_a by James Gurney (Turner)
- Semi-Prozine: S_c_i_e_n_c_e_F_i_c_t_i_o_n_C_h_r_o_n_i_c_l_e edited by Andy Porter
- Fanzine: M_i_m_o_s_a edited by Dick and Nicki Lynch
- Fan Writer: Dave Langford
- Fan Artist: Peggy Ranson
- John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer of 1991-1992 (Sponsored by Dell Magazines): Laura Resnick
- Special Committee Award: For building bridges between cultures and nations to advance science fiction and fantasy: Takumi Shibano
- Seiun Award for Best Novel Translated into Japanese: T_a_u_Z_e_r_o by Poul Anderson
- Seiun Award for Best Short Story Translated into Japanese: "The Groaning Hinges of the World" by R. A. Lafferty
- Seiun Award for Best Non-Fiction Translated into Japanese; T_h_e_M_i_n_d_s_o_f_B_i_l_l_y_M_i_l_l_i_g_a_n by Daniel Keyes
- Big Heart Award: Marjii Ellers
- First Fandom: Ray Beam

Yes, they got all the winners' names correct.

Well, that was certainly ... interesting.

And interesting is an understatement. This is the first year there has been a tie for best novel since 1966 when Frank Herbert's D_u_n_e and Roger Zelazny's A_n_d_C_a_l_l_M_e_C_o_n_r_a_d (a.k.a. T_h_i_s_I_m_m_o_r_t_a_l) shared the honor, with 702 ballots cast in this category. (841 people voted in all, down from last year's number.) S_c_i_e_n_c_e_F_i_c_t_i_o_n_C_h_r_o_n_i_c_l_e beat L_o_c_u_s by o_n_e point (out of 623 ballots cast in the category)! This broke a very long streak for Charlie Brown, and Andy Porter got the only standing ovation of the evening, and wearing his formal academic garb, declared, "These are not the robes of a Doctor of Divinity, but bless you all." Peggy Ranson won by two points in a category where 361 ballots were cast. At the other end, D_i_n_o_t_o_p_i_a was a runaway winner, with 327 votes to the next closest's 85. Warner's book had 203 points to the next closest's 100. (Please do not ask me to explain the preferential ballot system!) Connie Willis got a big laugh in her thank-you speech for "Even the Queen" when she said she had complained to Gardner Dozois on winning the Nebula for it that she would now have to go home and tell people what it was about--and she didn't know what to say. "Tell them it's a period piece," suggested Gardner.

The Seiuns were moved back with the Hugos, leaving the rest of

ConFrancisco

September 6, 1993

Page 4

M_u_l_t_i_p_l_e_x_M_a_n by James P. Hogan for Best Libertarian Science Fiction Novel of 1992, and T_h_e_D_i_s_p_o_s_s_e_s_s_e_d by Ursula K. LeGuin for Hall of Fame) were announced at "Speakers' Corner" in the Concourse, the Electric SF Awards didn't seem to be announced except at the ClariNet booth (I assume I would have been told, since I won the Best Fan Writer award), and I have no idea when or where the other awards were given out. (The Rhysling Award for Long Poem went to "To Be from Earth" by William Daciuk; for Short Poem, to "Will" by Jane Yolen.) Strong suggestion number something-or-other (I've lost count): Worldcons should make provision for an alternate awards ceremony, in a suitably festive room (not just an abandoned panel room). If nothing else, they should be awarded at the opening of the Con Suite in the evening (perhaps one or two a night), since people do congregate there. While I'm suggesting, I would also suggest a time limit on speeches be given the nominees (it has been done before)--most speeches were short, but some were quite long and I could hear the crowd getting restless. The planners did separate the non-Hugos from the Hugos with a ten- or fifteen-minute retrospective of the Hugos, which was similar to what was done last year in Orlando. Ironically, during the retrospective, Toastmaster Guy Gavriel Kay talked about the many Hugos L_o_c_u_s had won, and referred to Charlie Brown as "always a bride, never a bridesmaid"! Kim Stanley Robinson holds the professional "Always a Bridesmaid" record, by the way, having been nominated nine times without ever having won. This, in my humble opinion, is grossly unfair, and it's unfortunate in a way that he had such stiff competition this year.

The traditional "Hugo Losers Party" afterward, hosted by Conadian, was remarkably under-attended, many of the pro nominees having apparently decided to go to the big Dell party being thrown in the Con Suite. However, they missed some great food: smoked whitefish, cheese, fresh vegetables, pickerel cheeks in a sauce being cooked to order by a chef, and fresh raspberries. Since I hadn't had dinner, I was quite pleased with this arrangement.

And on a personal note, though I placed fourth in my category, I did get the most nominations. And however much that surprises you, trust me--it surprises me more!

Panel: B B B Bo o o oo o o ok k k ks s s s Y Y Y Yo o o ou u u u
S S S Sh h h ho o o ou u u ul l l ld d d d R R R Re e e ea a a ad d d d
Monday, 12:00 noon
Janice M. Eisen, David Kyle, Eric M. Van
[written by Mark R. Leeper]

"Some personal recommendations, not limited to SF, of what the well-read fan should read and why": This is a relatively commonly given panel. In this installment the participants were Janice Eisen, a reviewer for A_b_o_r_i_g_i_n_a_l_S_c_i_e_n_c_e_F_i_c_t_i_o_n. Eric Van is a co-founder of Readercon. Eric is famous for somewhat idiosyncratic tastes, nearly the opposite of those of the third panelist David Kyle, member of first fandom and author of A_P_i_c_t_o_r_i_a_l_H_i_s_t_o_r_y_o_f

ConFrancisco

September 6, 1993

Page 5

S_c_i_e_n_c_e_F_i_c_t_i_o_n. Kyle's expertise is predominantly in the science fiction of the pulp and sense of wonder days. Kyle arrived late.

Van started out the panel by distributing a sheet he wrote for the occasion called "Books You Should Read." Included are such odd choices as Graphic Novels: C_e_r_e_b_u_s[_t_h_e_A_a_r_d_v_a_r_k], D_a_r_e_d_e_v_i_l, and W_a_t_c_h_m_e_n. His humorous must-reads include T_h_e_N_a_t_i_o_n_a_l_L_a_m_p_o_o_n_H_i_g_h_S_c_h_o_o_l_Y_e_a_r_b_o_o_k_P_a_r_o_d_y, F_i_r_e_s_i_g_n_T_h_e_a_t_e_r's_B_i_g_B_o_o_k_o_f_P_l_a_y_s, and any collection of Bob and Ray. He includes a guide to rock 'n' roll by Paul Williams. He also lists two baseball Must-Reads. Under the category of "Change Your Worldview" he includes a Miss Manners etiquette book. Let's be fair: some of his must-read list includes some very good books, but it is clear his tastes are not necessarily shared by most people.

Van began by picking a book at random from his sheet. "A_r_s_l_a_n [by M. J. Engh] r_e_a_l_l_y blew my m_i_n_d." It is about a despot who wants to do terrible things. In reading it you will understand a little better how a Hitler could do the things he did.

Eisen had made a list of the core of the best standard science fiction books. Choosing at random she found Cordwainer Smith's "Rediscovery of Man" series. Smith is an acquired taste. Nearly all of his science fiction is in the book T_h_e_R_e_d_i_s_c_o_v_e_r_y_o_f_M_a_n being sold at the NESFA table. There is also a novel N_o_r_s_t_r_i_l_i_a, sold out because of Harlan Ellison's histrionics.

Van talked about "slipstream," a term applied to mainstream writing that has fantasy elements. He said Kurt Vonnegut is epitome of slipstream. He also recommended K_r_a_z_y_K_a_t: A_N_o_v_e_l_i_n_F_i_v_e_P_a_n_e_l_s by Jay Cantor. He says the novel works on about four levels; it is humorous, serious, it is poetic. The comic strip character Krazy Cat witnesses events in history like the Trinity bomb.

Eisen said she did not like angst-ridden superheroes in comic books, then she saw W_a_t_c_h_m_e_n. She said she "was knocked over by it." It did things she didn't think were done with super-hero comics.

Van said he agreed with every word and strongly recommended W_a_t_c_h_m_e_n. The most ambitious thing in the comic book field is C_e_r_e_b_u_s_t_h_e_A_a_r_d_v_a_r_k. Each of the books is thick like a phone book.

Each ends with closure, but the next one picks up seamlessly. He calls the books "mind-bogglingly ambitious." He suggested that readers try to get the first one. It does not start profound but gets so as it goes along. He also recommended Frank Miller's redefinition of the Batman story with T_h_e_D_a_r_k_K_n_i_g_h_t. He attributes to Miller the current rebirth of popularity in Batman and the resulting Batman films. Earlier Miller took over the comic book D_a_r_e_d_e_v_i_l, Marvel Comics worst-seller, and turned it into their best-seller.

Eisen wanted to recommend two books of science fiction criticism. She likes Damon Knight's I_n_S_e_a_r_c_h_o_f_W_o_n_d_e_r. She really likes Knight's writing style which could often be humorous and perceptive at the same time. The book contains a complete

"dissection" of A. E. van Vogt, and not to van Vogt's advantage. He can be cruel. She also recommended Ursula K. Leguin's L_a_n_g_u_a_g_e_o_f_t_h_e_N_i_g_h_t.

Van said he was going to recommend a book that sold three million copies but never got respect, N_a_t_i_o_n_a_l_L_a_m_p_o_o_n_H_i_g_h_S_c_h_o_o_l_Y_e_a_r_b_o_o_k_P_a_r_o_d_y. He has read it cover-to-cover. The more you read, the more you get out of it. It really captures the spirit of the 60's.

B_r_i_d_g_e_o_f_B_i_r_d_s by Barry Hughart was Ms. Eisen's next recommendation. It is hilarious. She also thought very funny David Langford's T_h_e_D_r_a_g_o_n_H_i_k_e_r's_G_u_i_d_e_t_o_B_a_t_t_l_e_f_i_e_l_d_C_o_v_e_n_a_n_t_a_t_D_u_n_e's_E_d_g_e.... It seems like a parody of every popular fantasy/science fiction novel within reach.

Van then revealed what he said was "the best book ever written," John Crowley's E_n_g_i_n_e_S_u_m_m_e_r. He had read the book and then circumstances forced him to reread almost immediately after finishing it. He discovered "all the stuff [he] missed." (One wonders if he had been forced to read more books twice in succession, if there would not be more "best books ever written.") The book is "a utopian novel set after civilization has fallen apart. That is only the tiny tip of iceberg."

The next books recommended by Eisen were Raymond Chandler's T_h_e_L_o_n_g_G_o_o_d_b_y_e and T_h_e_B_i_g_S_l_e_e_p, and K_i_m and C_a_p_t_a_i_n_s_C_o_u_r_a_g_e_o_u_s by Rudyard Kipling. She also suggests people read Dickens, but choose one you didn't have to read in school.

David Kyle, just arriving, said Dickens is a pulp writer who made it. He talked about the pulps and their precursors, the penny dreadfuls. Many writers pre-SF writers used a great deal of imagination. In G_u_l_l_i_v_e_r's_T_r_a_v_e_l_s there are islands in air and many strange worlds. Many of the classic fantasies are forerunners of modern fiction. What many people think is dry and outdated is not dry at all. The basis of much modern fantasy is right there.

Van seconded this testimonial for the classics. "P_a_r_a_d_i_s_e_L_o_s_t did not blow my mind but it was good. I got a real buzz from it." The I_l_l_i_a_d and the O_d_y_s_s_e_y were Eisen's recommendation.

Someone from the audience recommended T. S. Elliot's "Four Quartets."

Van suggested S_i_r_G_a_w_a_i_n_a_n_d_t_h_e_G_r_e_e_n_K_n_i_g_h_t is great fantasy.

Kyle said that for more examples read A P i c t o r i a l H i s t o r y
o f
S c i e n c e F i c t i o n. Someone in the audience asked the author. Kyle
 pretended to be searching his memory and then as if he found it said
 brightly "David Kyle."

Van called David Pringle's S c i e n c e F i c t i o n: T h e
1 0 0 B e s t N o v e l s
 "a superb book." The same publisher published 1 0 0 B e s t F a n t a s y
N o v e l s which Van said was good up to Tolkein, then not so good.
 Pringle found a differest publisher for his hundred-best fantasy
 novel list.

Eisen said that the one book she wanted to get to in this panel
 was H o w t o S u p p r e s s W o m e n' s
W r i t i n g by Joanna Russ. Kyle responded
 to the earlier mention of T. S. Elliot. When you mention poetry
 Tennyson comes to mind. His "Locksley Hall" is almost a song to
 science fiction.

Eisen thought the best post-holocaust novels were Walter
 Miller's C a n t i c l e f o r L i e b o w i t z and Edgar
 Pangborn's D a v y. (I
 wonder how much consideration she has given to Leon Uris' e x o d u s.)
 She recommended two publishers: the Collier Nucleus series and the
 publisher Carroll and Graf are both putting good older works into
 print. (I can second the opinion on Carroll and Graf. And with
 that comment, my Worldcon came to an end. I rushed to the Huckster
 room to buy one last book--published by Carroll and Graf, by the
 way--and returned to my hotel.)

Panel: G G G Gr r r r i i i i p p p e e e e
 S S S Se e e e s s s s s s s s i i i i o o o o n n n n
 Monday, 12 noon

Much of what I learned or heard about different aspects of the
 convention has been expressed in the appropriate section of this
 report; most of my gripes have been expressed already as well. But
 a few random items belong here, I suppose. Several people said that
 they had been contacting the convention with program ideas and
 offers to work, but never got any response, or got a response just a
 few weeks before the convention (when they had first written over a

year earlier). One problem seems to be that if someone suggests something that doesn't clearly fall into one particular section (for example, something that isn't quite programming, and isn't quite exhibit), then it gets batted back and forth and no one wants to take responsibility to follow up on it.

The claim was made that using the larger hall in the Moscone for the Masquerade and Hugo Awards Ceremony would have added at least \$20 to each membership in the convention. This seems hard to believe, but it underscores the fact that Worldcons are getting too big to be handled in any reasonable and cost-effective way by more than a handful of cities. (Exercise for some Worldcon historian: how many cities which have previously hosted Worldcons are no longer able to do so, from a facilities stand-point?)

ConFrancisco

September 6, 1993

Page 8

Ellison's panels were in such small rooms, according to the committee, because Ellison came to the committee two and a half weeks before the convention (after all the programming had been laid out) to tell them that he was attending and what time-slots he wanted to speak in.

There was a lack of intermediate-sized rooms: Larry Niven's Guest of Honor speech was in a room holding about 140. The next largest was one holding about 1500. It was decided that it was better to have him speak to a crowded room than a half-empty one, but future conventions should make sure they have at least one room for mid-sized events.

The letters to people who volunteered to be participants but were turned down was a point of contention. No matter how delicately they are phrased, they still will sound like the recipient is being told he or she is not important enough. As it was, ConFrancisco said they had more participants than MagiCon, and possibly more than Noreascon.

People were encouraged to volunteer; the committee claimed it took 10-20% of the attendees to help run a Worldcon. For their part, committees are reminded to touch base with volunteers at least every three months, even if only to say, "Yes, we have your name and will be sending more specific information soon."

The daily newsletter should carry all the various awards presented at the convention (see my notes on "other awards" above), and obviously this means that the presenters of awards must have press releases or the equivalent to give the editors of the newsletter.

Various Media Presentations
[written by Mark R. Leeper]

Nearly each year Evelyn and I go to the World Science Fiction convention. In 1976 at MidAmericon a then nearly unknown George Lucas came presenting materials from his upcoming film S t a r W a r s. While I would not rule out the possibility that it had been done before, this was certainly the first example I saw of a filmmaker using a science fiction convention like this. Starting that year popular film seems to have changed a lot in its pacing and also how it is merchandised. And one way is that more and more upcoming films seem to have previewed at science fiction conventions.

Over the years I have seen two major changes in these presentations. The first change is that rather than one filmmaker at presenting his own film, there were package presentations at which some "hired gun" who had sold his services to the studios would be presenting a whole package of films--sometimes from different studios. The other change was somewhat more subjective.

ConFrancisco

September 6, 1993

Page 9

The films seem more derivative and--well, lets admit it--much less exciting.

This year things are looking up ever-so-slightly. There is one upcoming television show that looks decent--actually, better than decent. But there is a lot coming up that I for one am going to be less than excited about. You can read that to mean that they look cheap, derivative, and way too much like things that have been bad in the past.

In the media presentation there were several teasers for the television series L o i s a n d C l a r k. So far the cleverest thing I have seen about the series is the title, though I suspect some of the

audience will not recognize the allusion to the famous expedition. Of course when I say that is the cleverest thing I have seen, it is about all I have seen. The whole presentation was three teasers implying that Lois Lane and Clark Kent would end up in bed with each other. Presumably it should be obvious that there are logic problems inherent in this inter-species coupling. Also poor Lois would probably be badly damaged by the man whose flesh is harder than steel. The same idea was explored in detail in the Larry Niven story "Man of Steel, Woman of Kleenex." My enthusiasm for the concept of sexy Superman stories is highly bounded.

Similarly we saw little more than teasers about _ s _ e _ a _ Q _ u _ e _ s _ t _ D _ S _ V, an expensive new series set in the ocean starring Roy Scheider and something that looks a lot like a rubber Flipper stand-in. There is lots of nice looking hardware but no sign that anything of great value will come from the program. Steven Spielberg is producing.

And speaking of famous people with initials S.S. (hey, I am admired for my clever transitions) Sylvester Stallone looks like he is aiming for _ T _ e _ r _ m _ i _ n _ a _ t _ o _ r with his _ D _ e _ m _ o _ l _ i _ t _ i _ o _ n _ M _ a _ n, but it sounds like he will end up closer to _ F _ r _ e _ e _ j _ a _ c _ k. The concept is that the worst criminal in all the world (played by Wesley Snipes) is captured by a reckless, but effective cop nicknamed the "Demolition Man" (played by Sylvester Stallone). Unfortunately a bunch of innocent people are killed in the process. So both criminal and cop are sentenced to cryogenic suspension--freezing. (Moral: In a topsy-turvy world, a good cop is treated like a criminal.) For Stallone the sentence is just some fifteen years in the freezer which implies the congealing of all that body oil into grease. For Snipes the sentence is eternity. It is not entirely clear why waste the freezer space on someone who is never going to thaw, but I guess there are precedents. (Also I guess some of the stuff at the back of our freezer at home is in pretty much the same state.) Flash forward some long time to a pristine and crimeless future--don't ask me how we got there from our present with ever-growing numbers of criminals, bad inner cities, racism, and ever-increasing library overdue incidents. Society is too effete to handle real crime, but through a nasty freezer accident Snipes escapes and is terrorizing

utopia. Luckily we have a macho greaseball on ice in the fridge. It's at times like this that society learns to value its macho greaseballs. (Incidentally, all of this was in a trailer I had seen weeks earlier at my neighborhood theater, and there was nothing in this tacky presentation I didn't already know.) This is not a film to look forward to.

We saw a trailer and little more for R_o_b_o_c_o_p_3 and what we saw made it look like little more than the mindless shoot-em-up that R_o_b_o_c_o_p_2 was. This time the evil system is against Robo and has made him a criminal. (Moral: In a topsy-turvy world, the good robocop is treated like a criminal.) I don't expect much here. Incidentally, Peter Weller is replaced by someone I could not recognize under the makeup, but he wasn't Weller or probably anyone else well-known.

One of the longest running of the great super-heroes is Lamont Cranston, who learned in the orient the ability to cloud people's minds so that he is essentially invisible. When he is invisible he is his alter-ego, The Shadow. Now nobody ever really knows what The Shadow really looks like since he was a hero of radio and pulp magazines. All you ever see is an artist conception of a man with a long crooked nose under a big concealing hat. It's enough to give you the willies. It is tough to judge who would make a good Shadow on the screen in the upcoming Shadow film. Basil Rathbone is pretty close, he might give you the heebie-jeebies if he was hiding somewhere in the shadows. Maybe they should get some unknown for the part in the film. But an unknown would give you no marquee value I guess. So instead got the modern equivalent of Basil Rathbone, the man with the commanding presence, with the deep voice, with the slightly scary looks. Yes, they cast as Lamont Cranston... Alec Baldwin??? (Oh barf! Well I guess he would be marginally better in the role than Julia Roberts.) We did see some production sketches on this one and the production seems to be in the hands of people who would rather emulate successful films about Batman than to try to understand the persona of the Shadow. At least one mistake: in the long-running radio show, which is where the Shadow became best known, all of his powers and all of his tools came from between his ears. He had no special cars or gas pistols. Everything he did was by mental powers. Well we saw a sketch of his office where an iris opens up and his chair sinks down when he wants to make a getaway unseen. As if he couldn't walk out right in front of his secretary and simply cloud her mind. He is, after the Shadow. Or he was before they started the film. Mechanical gimmicks are right for Batman but all wrong for the Shadow.

Oh, and speaking of weird casting, Stan Winston, an Oscar winner for special effects like those of J_u_r_a_s_s_i_c_P_a_r_k was on hand to defend the casting of Tom Cruise as the Vampire Lestat in I_n_t_e_r_v_i_e_w_w_i_t_h_t_h_e_V_a_m_p_i_r_e. He talked for a long time about the film but at the same time said very little. He had brought a slide

of what Cruise will look like as Lestat, but could not show it since it might be videotaped and of course it must be kept in extreme secrecy for whatever reason filmmakers always like extreme secrecy. I guess there is some danger that some other filmmaker will cast Cruise as Lestat in some other film and use the same makeup. In any case we heard how _ g _ r _ e _ a _ t Cruise was as Lestat, but learned little else of value.

Lest it sound like there was nothing good to look forward to in upcoming productions, J. Michael Straczynski was present to show what was coming up for _ B _ a _ b _ y _ l _ o _ n _ 5. I want everyone to remember that after the pilot was broadcast, it was me who said that I was willing to trade two episodes of any _ S _ t _ a _ r _ T _ r _ e _ k series for any one episode _ B _ a _ b _ y _ l _ o _ n _ 5. Reactions to the pilot were very mixed, but I was really impressed by what I was seeing. I am already preparing to say "I told ya' so." I would now say that the two for one trade underrates "_ B _ a _ b _ y _ 5" (as I have nicknamed the series, without loss of respect). We saw about twenty minutes from one of the episodes and forget the series, I really want to know how the episode will come out. It involves a conflict between two species, one good, one evil. The problem is that you can only determine which is the good species and which one is evil if you know if the spirit dies with the body or if souls are somehow reincarnated to live again. And _ B _ a _ b _ y _ 5 isn't going to tell you. It seems like a lot of the episodes are going to hinge on philosophical principles that the viewer is going to have to decide for him/ herself. Straczynski says his goal is to start arguments and perhaps a few good bar fights with his series. It has been a while since we have seen science fiction sophisticated enough to do that. The British do that at least on occasion, but American SF in film and television seems to have the flash of effects but rarely the spark of any real intelligence.

Of course _ B _ a _ b _ y _ 5 will have its "toaster graphics" which certainly are impressive. They substitute a sort of artistic feeling for the realism of effects that the current _ S _ t _ a _ r _ T _ r _ e _ k shows seem to use. The effects in _ B _ a _ b _ y _ 5 look more like animations of the book covers use, particularly British ones. They are imaginative and for the time being it is very impressive to see sights like spaceships unfolding solar sails like giant metallic insects. I would say, however, that the novelty of that sort of effect is bound to wear off over the projected five-year run of _ B _ a _ b _ y _ 5. This is

particularly true since "video toaster graphics," the kind used in B_a_b_y_5 are a lot cheaper than those created by Industrial Light and Magic, and B_a_b_y_5 has no exclusive on them. That means we are probably going to see similar effects very commonly. The special effects are not going to be that much of a draw after the first six months, but I think that the story will be. I am just a little concerned about a series that is going to be hard to join in the middle because of what the viewer has already missed. For now I intend to watch faithfully and I suspect that once the series gets going, I will not be alone.

ConFrancisco

September 6, 1993

Page 12

Miscellaneous

At each of the last three conventions I've gone to, someone has mistaken me for Connie Willis. I almost got through ConFrancisco without this happening, but just as we were leaving the convention center for the last time, someone passing us asked his friend, "Do you have D_o_o_m_s_d_a_y_B_o_o_k?" and when she handed it to him, held it out to me. I probably just should have signed it, but instead I said, "I am not Connie Willis. I am not as tall as she is, I do not have the same hair color as she does, and I didn't win two Hugos last night." Maybe I'll have a button made!

The WSFS Business Meeting was at noon instead of the traditional 10 AM on the days it was held, and at the ANA Hotel, making it very difficult to get to. As a result, attendance was down. The Northwest Territories Division Amendment, the amendment clarifying the best fan writer definition (making it clear it is for work in the previous year), and the amendment reducing NASFiC lead time passed. These had previously been approved at MagiCon, so are now adopted. Passed and passed on to Conadian is 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 hotel had an automatic check-out through the television, but we couldn't use it when we were checking out at 5:00 AM. Luckily, there was no line. :-)

The Information Desk was not always helpful. In particular, a

friend of ours asked them about parking on Sunday and Monday, because the Moscone Center Garage which was recommended in the Pocket Program was closed those days. First the person he talked to said he should look in the book. When he pointed out that he had, and that it was wrong, they basically told him to try checking with some other garages, at which point he thanked them for their help (no doubt somewhat sarcastically). As he was walking away, the person behind the desk (who must have thought he was out of earshot) said something extremely uncomplimentary about him. The Information Desk should have information, or be willing to find it, perhaps asking the person to check back later. It should under no circumstances be rude and offensive. (This applies even if the "customer" is, though knowing the person involved here, I doubt that was the case.) I would like to think this was a single individual rather than a constant problem at the Information Desk, but a convention should make sure that only people who have the right personality for that job work at the Information Desk.

Panelists were signaled with a "YIELD" sign when there was fifteen minutes left, and a "STOP" sign when time had run out. This was confusing--many panelists thought the "YIELD" sign meant they had to yield the room. It was a good idea to keep panels to fifty

ConFrancisco

September 6, 1993

Page 13

minutes instead of an hour, because that gave people time to get to the next item and maybe even have a bathroom break.

ConFrancisco did not provide a free drink to participants at the "Meet the VIPs" party as had been done by previous conventions. Frankly, this is probably a good thing. It seems a better use of the money to spend it on something for the con at large, and I doubt anyone's attendance or non-attendance at the party is determined by whether they get one free drink.

As is traditional, I'll list the Worldcons I've attended and rank them, best to worst (the middle cluster are pretty close together, and it's getting harder and harder to fit the new ones in, perhaps because the cons of fifteen years ago are hard to remember in detail):

Noreascon II
MagiCon

Noreascon III
Noreascon I
Midamericon
L.A.con II
ConFrancisco
Chicon V
Discon II
Seacon
Confederation
Chicon IV
ConFiction
Conspiracy
Iguanacon
Suncon
Nolacon II
Constellation

This con report runs about 24,000 words, due in large part to the abundance of interesting programming. (At Chicon V I went to twelve panels; at MagiCon I went to sixteen; this year at ConFrancisco it was twenty-four plus two lectures.) I will also admit to a certain verbosity.

Unlike the last couple of years, the site selection was n o t a hard-fought battle, Los Angeles (Anaheim) being uncontested. 1286 votes were cast, compared to last year's 2541. James White, Roger Corman, Takumi and Sachiko Shibano are the Guests of Honor. Connie Willis is Toastmaster (their word, not mine). Elsie Wollheim is the Special Guest. (The Fan Guest of Honour for Intersection (Glasgow 1995) was supposed to be announced at ConFrancisco, but wasn't--at least not that I heard.) The convention will be called L.A.con III (this is what is known as the "typography from Hell") and will be August 29 to September 2, 1996. In spite of the uncontested nature, it was apparently decided that people could n o t buy attending

memberships at voting time (as was done with MagiCon), so on Monday there was quite a long line of people wanting to upgrade to attending membership. Bruce Pelz found himself working alone for a while until help arrived, but I'm surprised that the LA committee didn't realize their table would be swamped. (Contact address in

the United States is L.A.con III, c/o S.C.I.F.I., P. O. Box 8442,
Van Nuys CA 91409.)

Next year in Winnipeg!

