

Short Stuff II

Cartoon Madness (1993)

"Mad Scientist" (1941)

The 21st Tournee of Animation (1990)

"Creature Comforts" (1990)

"To Be" (1991)

We will start with an Arts & Entertainment special on Max (and Dave) Fleischer with narration by Leonard Maltin and several complete Fleischer cartoons, including an early Betty Boop cartoon, "Bingo's Initiation," and "Cinderella." We will follow this with "Mad Scientist," one of Fleischer's famous Superman cartoons.

The second part of the evening will be dedicated to more recent animation. First we have the 21st Tournee of Animation. Periodically (but apparently not yearly) there is a collection of the best animated films since the last Tournee. This compilation is then put on a single film and released to art theaters. We have seen the 19th, 20th, 22nd, and 23rd Tournees in the theaters, but missed the 21st, so we have gotten the videotape of the best of the 21st and will be showing that. Since even we haven't seen it yet, all we can tell you is that it has ten animated shorts from all over the world, including one Academy Award nominee, and if it's up to the standards of all the other Tournees, it should be enjoyable indeed. We will wrap up the evening with "To Be" (a recent science fiction short from the National Film Board of Canada) and "Creature Comforts" (the 1991 Academy Award winner for "Animated Short Subject"). [-ecl]

2. A reminder on discussion book availability:

S t e e l B e a c h by John Varley is available at the Old Bridge and Monmouth County (Headquarters) libraries; the paperback is due out in August from Ace. A r i s t o i by Walter Jon Williams is available at

the Old Bridge library; the paperback is due out in September from Tor. T_h_o_m_a_s_t_h_e_R_h_y_m_e_r by Ellen Kushner is available at the Monmouth County (Headquarters, Eastern, and Extension branches) library; the paperback is out, but hard to find. W_o_r_l_d_a_t_t_h_e_E_n_d_o_f_T_i_m_e by Frederik Pohl is available at the Monmouth County (Headquarters, Extension, and Eastern branches) and Old Bridge libraries; it is available in paperback as well. T_h_e_U_s_e_o_f_W_e_a_p_o_n_s by Iain Banks is available at the Monmouth County (Extension branch) library; it is available in paperback as well. S_i_g_h_t_o_f_P_r_o_t_e_u_s by Charles Sheffield is available at the Old Bridge library; it is available in paperback as well. [-ecl]

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Boskone 30
(Part 1 of 3)
Con report by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Well, the drive was an hour longer going up this year, due to the move from Springfield to Framingham, and three hours longer coming back, because there was a snowstorm added on as well. Still, having everything in one hotel w_a_s nice.

Two years ago, panelists registered in the regular registration area and were given their panelist information there. Last year we had to go to the Green Room to get our panelist information, and this was in the other hotel, so this was a trifle inconvenient. This year they returned to handing out the panelist information at the regular registration desk.

Hotel

The Sheraton Tara was quite nice, and having everything in one hotel a definite plus! There were a couple of panels with people standing in back, but on the whole crowding was not a problem. The move to Framingham does not seem to have changed the size of Boskone any; it has been holding steady at 900 or so for the past three years. The parties seemed fairly empty, except for the party with the belly-dancer.

Dealers Room

Since there was only one hotel, there was only one dealers room, but this had what might be called a "back room" with some of the dealers, and this back room was possibly less trafficked in than the main room. There were about the same number of dealers as previous years, with books predominating. I didn't see any Japanese videos, but the rest of the assortment was similar to last year's as well. As usual, I found a half-dozen books I couldn't find anywhere else (though I hadn't checked the Science Fiction Shop in New York yet), and a couple more I picked up on impulse. There was a Border's Bookstore nearby, but car problems, lack of time, and the feeling that there were superstores near us at home kept us from getting there (although I believe Willis and Yolen had an autograph session there Friday afternoon).

Art Show

For the first time at a Boskone, I didn't get to the Art Show. Okay, that's not e_x_a_c_t_l_y true: I did stick my head through the door at one point to see how Mark's origami panel was going. It was packed and I left. But I never got a chance to look at the art itself. I think it's because I have been increasingly disappointed at the contents and so never made the time. Then again, attending every Connie Willis panel kept me pretty busy!

Programming

There were a few science panels, none of which I got to. I guess the era of the "hard-science" Boskone is over. Most of the science panels were computer-oriented. I think the overall number of panels may be decreasing as well. This is due to the lower attendance at Boskone--fewer attendees mean fewer panel participants, as well as fewer people in the audience. (Though Joe Haldeman was the Guest of Honor, I never got to a panel of his. I mention this because from the number of Connie Willis panels I attended, you might think s_h_e was the Guest of Honor. Actually, she came to Boskone because it was on the way to Chicago, where she was traveling for a Monday conference. How is Boston on the way from Colorado to Chicago? Well, my guess is that by flying round-trip to Boston with a stop-over in Chicago on the way back, Willis could then have a Saturday night stay, which for some reason makes airline tickets a l_o_t cheaper, enough cheaper in fact probably to cover the cost of the hotel room for Boskone. Anyway, I was quite pleased about this turn of events.)

The First Night

The Friday night Meet-the-VIPs party was held in the same room as the film, and adjacent to the con suite. This allowed the Shirim Klezmer Orchestra to set up their equipment only once instead of having to move it from the party to the film room as they did last year. At the party I was approached by someone who asked if I would mind signing some autographs. It turns out he thought I was Connie Willis (shades of MagiCon!). Connie Willis is several inches taller than I am, and her hair is red rather than dark brown, but I guess from a black-and-white photo on a book jacket, we look alike. Why doesn't anyone claim I w_r_i_t_e like Connie Willis?

The con suite offered free munchies as well as free soft drinks this year (last year the drinks were free, but the chips and such were not).

I couldn't spend all my time at the party, because Mark had a film panel at 9 PM.

SF Movies and TV: The Year in Review

Friday, 9 PM

Daniel Kimmel (mod), Saul Jaffe, Mark R. Leeper, Jim Mann

I got to the panel late, but didn't seem to have missed much. Kimmel was "moderating" the panel by listing every science fiction, fantasy, and horror film he could think of that was released in 1992, and only at the end of the list asking for additions or additional comments. Even with his long list (he works for V_a_r_i_e_t_y), he omitted G_r_a_n_d_T_o_u_r: D_i_s_a_s_t_e_r_i_n_T_i_m_e (based on C. L. Moore's "Vintage Season"), K_a_f_k_a, R_u_n_e_s_t_o_n_e, S_h_a_d_o_w_s_a_n_d_F_o_g, and Z_e_n_t_r_o_p_a (known in Europe as E_u_r_o_p_a). Mann noted the availability of G_o_d_z_i_l_l_a_v_s_B_i_o_l_l_a_n_t_e on videotape; I noted the videotape release of the 1931 Spanish-language D_r_a_c_u_l_a after many years of total unavailability (the only complete print was in a vault in Havana).

Kimmel then had Jaffe list all the television released in 1992. Since Jaffe is working on a book about science fiction television, he had a very complete list, but I think most people started tuning out during the long list of Saturday morning cartoon shows. Mann recommended "The Inner Light" as the best of 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; I recommended American Playhouse's "Fool's Fire" (based on Edgar Allan Poe's "Hopfrog").

Nosferatu

Friday, 10 PM

The only part of the film program I got to was N_o_s_f_e_r_a_t_u. I think R_o_b_o_t_J_o_x was also shown on film; there was a video program as well. N_o_s_f_e_r_a_t_u was shown with live accompaniment by the Shirim Klezmer Orchestra. They had solved the problems of set-up and reel changes that plagued last year's film, but the music didn't always suit the movie. Mark and I particularly agreed that a klezmer-disco version of "Summertime" from P_o_r_g_y_a_n_d_B_e_s_s was probably not what Murnau had in mind when he made the film.

Parties

I dropped by the "Boston in 1998" party to find out what was going on. The Sheraton Boston had signed a contract with the American Political Science Association for Labor Day weekend, 1998, but the Hynes Convention Center was still interested in having Noreascon. The issue seems to be whether enough hotel rooms in the immediate area can be

found to sustain the convention. My feeling was that the committee members thought there could be, and that the bid would proceed without the Sheraton. Bidding against Boston are Baltimore and Niagara Falls. I went to the Baltimore party Saturday night and was heartily u_n_i_m_p_r_e_s_s_e_d. Based on the people there I spoke to, a Baltimore convention shows every sign that it would be just as poorly run as the last Baltimore convention. I could be wrong, but unless they concentrate more on the content and less on offering rum drinks, they will not be getting my vote.

Saturday Morning

We were going to go out for breakfast, but our car wouldn't start. The battery cranked, but the engine just wouldn't catch. Eventually we gave up and ate in the hotel dining room. We figured we could go out for dinner, since friends would be arriving with another car, but it turned out that they were afraid to give up their parking space. (There were more parking spaces behind the hotel, but this was not obvious.)

History in SF

Saturday, 11 AM

Michael F. Flynn, Mark Keller, Connie Willis

The panelists started by saying they would be talking about setting stories in the past or using the past in science fiction. Alternate histories were of course mentioned but on the whole the panelists dealt with other uses of history in science fiction. (Keller did point out the alternate histories have a firm academic background, at least in economics, where "counter-factuals" are a standard tool.)

One popular use of history is to provide a ready-made background for a future or alien society, or as Mark Keller described it, "Look it up instead of make it up." The Turkish Ottoman Empire, for example, was the basis of the society in Frank Herbert's D_u_n_e (and subsequent books).

This has the advantage of being realistic and consistent (at least as much as history itself ever is), but can also be a bit obvious and strained to the reader.

Another approach is to break some historical law. For example, stories with faster-than-light travel break a physical law. Larry Niven's *P_r_o_t_e_c_t_o_r* breaks a biological law. Stories can also break historical laws, although clearly there is far more disagreement on what constitutes a historical law. One person gave as an example that a story could break "Marxist law"; Keller suggested that L. Neil

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Smith's alternate histories assume a universe in which libertarianism works. This latter sounded more like a desire to stir up controversy than anything else, since Flynn has won the Prometheus Award from the Libertarians two years in a row. But Flynn did not rise to the bait (offered twice in the hour). The question of exactly what

constitutes a historical law brought up the book *C_y_c_l_e_s, _t_h_e*

_S_c_i_e_n_c_e_o_f_P_r_e_d_i_c_t_i_o_n by Edward R. Dewey and Edwin F. Dakin,

which in 1947 predicted the economic cycles that we seem to be living through: a big recession in the early 1980s, another smaller one in the early 1990s, an upturn in January 1993, and a big upturn in 2006. (This is supposedly still in print from the Foundation for the Study of Cycles, 1964, 255pp, \$15.)

Willis suggested the only thing we can do to predict the future was to try to "extrapolate the future from the past." Her upcoming novella for Bantam, "Uncharted Territory," does that in its story of a meeting between an advanced culture and a primitive one. (I will say more about that below when I talk about the reading.)

This led to some comments on "PC" ("political correctness") which Willis says is trying to correct the mistakes of the past without taking into account Murphy's Law. Murphy's Law figures into this in two ways: first, many of the mistakes were the result of Murphy's Law, and

second, all our attempts to correct things will also be plagued by Murphy's Law.

Willis also pointed out that coincidence happens in history. (Stephen Jay Gould's whole theory of evolutionary biology is built up from contingencies.) Alternate histories try to avoid coincidence because that technique has fallen into disrepute, but the fact remains that truth is stranger than fiction. A reasonable middle road to take is to use coincidence in your set-up but not in your resolution. Any coincidence later in your story needs to have been set up ahead of time. (For example, the coincidental meeting of two friends can trigger old feelings that set the plot into motion, but the hero better not be saved from the gallows by the last-minute appearance of a here-to-fore unmentioned twin brother.)

Keller described Fernand Braudel's "Theory of History," in which there are three modes: long stretch, oscillating or fluctuating, and progressive. (These will sound familiar to anyone who has read Maureen F. McHugh's C_h_i_n_a_M_o_u_n_t_a_i_n_Z_h_a_n_g.) Braudel was an economic historian, and looked primarily at economic trends. All economical/historical trends theoretically fit into one of these modes. For

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example, "standard of living" is generally considered to be progressive, while "skirt lengths" is oscillating. Long stretch, I assume, is a reference to historical inertia--it takes a long time to effect substantial changes.

As usual, Josephine Tey's D_a_u_g_h_t_e_r_o_f_T_i_m_e (Macmillan, 1988, \$4.95) was mentioned as a good book demonstrating how to research history. Panelists agreed that it was necessary to read primary sources, not just what historians say about them, and this was connected to the "tempocentrism" Willis felt was evidenced by many historians.

Using history in one's stories is not without its pitfalls, however. Willis related that at a discussion of her novel L_i_n_c_o_l_n'_s_D_r_e_a_m_s one of the attendees asked how

much of the Civil War material Willis had made up (none of it, it turns out). When pressed, the attendee said, "Well, for example, who's this Grant character?" The panelists (and the audience) agreed, I think, that one must operate within the (ever-shrinking) realm of popular knowledge, but there is still much disagreement on the boundaries of that realm. One audience member, for example, seemed shocked that a reader of Dan Simmons's *H_y_p_e_r_i_o_n* didn't recognize the name of a saint mentioned in passing early on as actually being the cleric who was involved in the Piltdown Hoax and who set forth a theological explanation of evolution involving multiple, parallel lineages, all moving towards a state of more spirit and less matter. (This is Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, whose evolutionary theories are put forward to *T_h_e_P_h_e_n_o_m_e_n_o_n_o_f_M_a_n* [Harper Collins, 1975, \$12], and who is discussed at great length in Stephen Jay Gould's *H_e_n'_s_T_e_e_t_h_a_n_d_H_o_r_s_e'_s_T_o_e_s* [Norton, 1983, 413pp, \$6.95].) In a society in which people don't recognize the name of Grant in connection with the Civil War, this seems an overly optimistic expectation of your readership's knowledge.

Someone in the audience said he was writing an alternate history in which a woman was elected president sometime earlier this century by 95% of the voters, the Electoral College having been dissolved. This led panelists to point out that the key to a believable alternate history is having only one change, and dumping the Electoral College *a_n_d* electing a woman was one change too many. Also noted was that 95% of the voters never agree on *a_n_y_t_h_i_n_g* and if the writer wanted to indicate a landslide, he should look at old election results to get some idea of what constitutes a landslide.

Willis said the biggest problem with using history in science fiction is that many people have what she called

"tempocentrism" (or "now-ism"). Historians are *n_o_t*

unbiased. In her research for D o o m s d a y B o o k she found many historians who talked about how the reason the plague killed so many was that the people of that time were dirty, ignorant, etc. But Willis notes that even today, if diagnosed and treated with the best our medical science has to offer, the plague has a 50% mortality rate. She also objected to the characterization of people of the 14th Century as being unfeeling and unaffected by deaths the way we are, because they were used to it. Willis quoted a man from Vienna in 1347 who wrote, "This day have I buried my wife and five children in one grave. No tears. It is the end of the world." Historians also say things like, "The plague was of a purgative rather than a disastrous nature," which indicates (to me, anyway) that they are being just as callous as they accuse the 14th Century people as being. (She talks about this at greater length in her interview in the July 1992 issue of L o c u s.)

This led to a brief discussions of plagues and diseases in history. Rene Dubos's T h e M i r a g e o f H e a l t h : U t o p i a s , P r o g r e s s , & B i o l o g i c a l C h a n g e (Rutgers University Press, 1987, 236pp, \$13) was cited as a source which discussed the deaths in the Western Hemisphere from disease during the first half of the 16th Century. In 1520, there were estimated to be 25,000,000 people in Mexico; a generation later there were only 2,500,000. The Spaniards did not i n t e n d to kill 90% of the population; this happened because of diseases they unwittingly carried (and to which they were, on the whole, immune). One audience member seemed to want to hold on to the idea that the Europeans did this deliberately and suggested that they put the smallpox carriers on the ships to send the disease over them, but as someone else pointed out, "You do n o t want disease carriers on the same ship as you!" (Diseases worked against the Europeans in some places as well. There is a Gambian stamp honoring the mosquito as being the primary reason that Europeans were unable to colonize that country for so many years.)

Successful diseases adapt to keep the host alive longer, so that they can live longer. "That's why AIDS is such a wonderful disease," said Willis, though quickly clarifying that she meant in terms of its survival characteristics rather than a good thing for humans. One thing I noticed at this panel is that e v e r y o n e seems to mis-use the word "decimate": it means to kill off one-tenth, n o t to leave only a tenth.

In summary, the message seemed to me that people in the past weren't that different from us (said Keller), but they

were not like us (added Willis). Someone mentioned T_h_e_B_i_g
S_k_y by Alfred B. Guthrie, Jr. (Bantam, 1984, \$4.95), which captures the mind-set of a 19th Century trapper, but makes him so alien the modern reader can't relate to him. Willis says that the problem is that "we live in a self-centered age" and think that our beliefs are of necessity more correct than those of the past. She talked about the recent attempts to change church language into something more inclusive of women, and cited a change to a hymn by St. Francis which eventually drove her to leave the choir because, as she put it, "To set ourselves above St. Francis is a great act of hubris and foolishness." Willis in general decried the current trend toward politically correctness which seems to treat everyone from the past as villains because they didn't agree with us. As Keller said, we may disagree with them, but "they were sincere" (i.e., they didn't do what they did to be evil, but because they believed it was right).

(End of Part 1)

