

character at the meetings. To reregister, just send us a copy of the top page of this notice.

3. You may have noticed some format changes with this issue. With the change in volume number, we have also finally named ourselves.

THE MT VOID

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Eight years of being "The Holmdel Science Fiction Club," "The Lincroft Science Fiction Club," "The Holmdel-Lincroft Science Fiction Club," "The Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club," "The Lincroft-Holmdel-Middletown Science Fiction Club," and numerous variations on these have led to some confusion with outside organizations we deal with. Internally, of course, we are still simply "the science fiction club at the Holmdel location," but in order to get referred to in a reasonable manner externally we are now using the pseudonym "the Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society." (We had considered the "Holzmt Science Fiction Society" and the "Lzmtho Science Fiction Society," but we thought a name that could be pronounced by humans would be a nice touch.)

We have also finally named this publication. Since we are the only weekly science fiction newsletter that I know of, I thought we at least deserved a name. So welcome to THE MT VOID. Oh, and even though the volume number is only 6, we are really in our ninth year. We didn't start numbering the issues until 1982. [-ecl]

4. On Wednesday, July 8, the Middies will be discussing Niven and Pournelle's FOOTFALL. Rather than give you another boring book description, I will give you the Soviet reaction to it (from my diary of my trip to the Soviet Union last year):

We crossed the border about 4:45 PM. First we cleared Finnish passport control at the last Finnish town (Vainikkala). Then we went a little ways further and the Soviet border control got on. First they collected the passports and visas and checked the compartment for any hidden persons. It was then we discovered that the seats lifted up and there was luggage space under them! Then we crossed the border while they began doing luggage checks. For this, everyone went into the corridor. Then the

guard asked Mark to come back in and point out his luggage. He went through Mark's luggage asking about various items. When he got to Mark's copy of FOOTFALL, he looked at it and said, "It is forbidden," and passed it to someone in the corridor. They passed it around, trying to figure out what it was, but had trouble knowing what to make of it. (Let's face it, most Americans wouldn't know what to make of a novel about elephants from outer space invading Kansas.) They were trying to decide if it was "pornographia." Eventually they decide it wasn't and returned it. What was notable was that their immediate reaction to something unknown was, "It is forbidden"--just like the Orwellian "Everything not required is forbidden." Then I was called in. They went over me with a metal detector, checked my pocket knife (no

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problem), glanced at my diary, and looked at my books. The Xeroxes of articles on the post-moderns in science fiction also got passed around and returned. They went through one other person's luggage from our compartment, and let the other three pass. None of the guards ever smiled or even ceased scowling. It was an interesting experience but not what I would call a pleasant one.

So there you have it--the official Soviet reaction to FOOTFALL. (Good thing they didn't find some of the passages where Pournelle talks about the Soviets or we'd probably still be there!) [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
MT 3E-433 957-5619
...mtgzz!leeper

Book Reviews by Nigel

It has been a while since I wrote any reviews and my world has changed a few times since then. I beg your indulgence if I talk about anything for the second time, if I repeat myself, or even if I should contradict myself.

In general, I will talk about things that I have read within the

last week or so. Since I have a habit of rereading books and magazines from my collection, which is old and substantially bought in England, you may not be able to find some of the books I mention. Should you get really enthusiastic about such a work, get it touch (I'll only ask for trivial security deposit, just enough for a flight back to England to replace it if necessary). On the other hand, I also buy and read new books which you should have no trouble finding.

Since experience shows that no one ever responds to my reviews, I am not telling you what my mail address is. Evelyn knows so send comments and other mail to her for forwarding; besides, it lets her know that you care about what you read.

IN CONQUEST BORN by C. S. Friedman

The publishers obviously think that this is wonderful, amazing, dramatic, and other such adjectives. They have printed it with a Whelan cover in both normal and mirror image modes. That is, if you look carefully, the cover has either a man in black on the front and a woman in white on the back or vice versa. It is a nice picture, but it strikes me that this is a ploy to appeal to both male and female markets. It also strikes me that this ploy is being defeated by the retailer who cannot be bothered to order appropriate numbers of copies of each version (assuming he knows) and then dedicate the display space.

I bought my copy at Dalton's and signed up for their F&SF book club. I was given a copy of the newsletter which had a discussion of the book, naturally saying how wonderful it was and generally encouraging me to read it quickly. Well, fool that I am, I did.

I was disappointed. The book is long, which is not necessarily a fault. The story moves right along, maintaining interest, introducing this and that until you get to 80% of the way through. Then you start wondering about why X has not reappeared, and what happened to Y and what was the point of Z.

At 95% you begin saying, "What happened to the story?" and "This can't be the end." Then you find the Epilogue which explains precisely nothing.

To be nice about it, the universe is well crafted and full of interesting cultures. The characters do develop but are extremes and so difficult to relate to. The social aspects of culture are shown well and lend a degree of verisimilitude that is rare in a first effort.

All in all, good writing but no story.

WITH A SINGLE SPELL by Lawrence Watt-Evans

This is a fairly recent publication. It is set in the same world as T_h_e_M_i_s-s_p_e_l_l_e_d_S_w_o_r_d. Both of these stories are humourous sword and sorcery. At the same time, the stories are not totally frivolous. A lot of effort has gone into providing a detailed, consistent world. The difference between this world and the universe of I_n_C_o_n_q_u_e_s_t_B_o_r_n is that here we see, and mostly don't notice, the details of how the parts of the world society fit together as opposed to seeing glimpses of lots of different cultures that don't fit.

In this story we see how an unlucky youth uses his one spell to achieve his ambitions. His luck does change and there are some small signs that his character also changes.

The Epilogue in this case does fill in a few of the gaps in the story and maintains interest in the world.

This story I enjoyed and I recommend, together with T_h_e_M_i_s-s_p_e_l_l_e_d_S_w_o_r_d, which is not a prequel.

TO SAIL BEYOND THE SUNSET by Robert A. Heinlein

I was given this as a birthday present. This is both good and bad. The good part is that I don't have to buy the book. The bad part is that the person who bought it for me wasted their money.

The book is the memoirs of Maureen Johnson, the mother of Lazarus Long. The book is well-written but the story is virtually nonexistent. We are presented with a presumably rosy picture of life in the Bible Belt from the 1890's up to the end of World War I. We get another view of the meeting of Lazarus and Maureen, which is interesting in that it shows that two views of the same events are not the same.

From this point on, the book becomes sketchier. The point of divergence between our and her time lines is pointed out and the finale of the book is the rescue of her father from the blitz on Coventry during the Battle of Britain with further interference to ensure yet another time line.

The main point in reading the book would be to study the opinions on change in the moral, or ethical, structure of the citizens of the country. Some direct assumptions are thrown up in passing, e.g., the introduction of the telephone is the root cause of doctors no longer

making house calls. Some assumptions or assertions are made in a much more subtle way, e.g., inbreeding is only bad at the sibling incest level.

All of the expanded-universe stories include a high degree of inbreeding among the Howard families. None of the effects of such inbreeding, other than lifespan, are ever mentioned. On the other hand, there are a number of places where sibling marriages are preached against on the basis of bringing out double recessive genes. This strikes me as being inconsistent.

There is another chapter in this book which preaches against drugs but offers no solution. In fact, Maureen takes the wimp-out approach of "It didn't happen here so its not my problem." This is not the response I would have expected from the character portrayed up to that point in the book.

In summary, this is not a story--it is a collection of vaguely related incidents including a little controversial material. It does not extend the expanded universe materially. It does provide a few more lines to tie books to. It is not worth the hardcover price and may not be worth the paperback price when it appears. It may help sales of some of his earlier works.

Readercon I
Con report by Evelyn C. Leeper
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About twelve years ago, Mark and I were involved in a science fiction discussion group. We were discussing Niven and Pournelle's I_n_f_e_r_n_o and I made the comment that I thought the original was much better, to which someone replied, "Oh, you read the magazine version too?"

It was at that point that I first realized the need for Readercon.

Unfortunately, I had to wait twelve years for it, but Readercon finally materialized. Dedicated to the written word, Readercon I was held the weekend of June 26 through June 28 at the Brookline Holiday Inn in Brookline, Massachusetts. 330 people registered, with 280 of those actually attending. People came from as far away as California and Utah, though the majority were from the Boston area.

Hotel

The hotel was s_t_i_l_l under construction in spite of promises to the contrary. The main entrance to the garage was blocked off, and I had to ask at the desk to find out where the back entrance was. When I first said the entrance was blocked, the clerk at the desk said it wasn't unless it was "the convention people with all those books." This was my first indication that the hotel did not have the best attitude towards

us. There was no bar, and the coffee shop was open for breakfast only. The service at breakfast was poor, as was the food. Next year's Readercon will (thank goodness!) be held elsewhere.

Hucksters' Room

The hucksters' room was entirely books! (Well, okay, there were a few cassettes of authors reading their works, and I did see a couple of tarot decks stuck under a book rack.) That's the good news. The bad news is that it was small--only eight dealers (or maybe seven--it was hard to tell where one ended and another began). Oddly enough, this is about the same number of book dealers that one finds at a much larger, general science fiction convention (like Lunacon), so I suppose one shouldn't complain. The quality was very high.

Programming

If you are the sort who does not attend program items at conventions, Readercon is not for you. There was little to do other than the program items. There was a main track and a mini-track, the latter consisting mostly of readings. We didn't arrive until Saturday morning--and had to drive through a pouring rainstorm to do that!--so I cannot describe the Friday night events.

The Legacy of Cyberpunk

The first panel was at 10:00 AM Saturday and was the SOCP (Semi-Obligatory Cyberpunk Panel). James Patrick Kelly led the panel, with Mark Ziesing and Martha Millard as the other members. It was generally granted that Bruce Sterling is the Secret Master of cyberpunk

(particularly after his definition cyberpunk anthology M_i_r_r_o_r_s_h_a_d_e_s), although William Gibson has gotten far more attention. For example,

Gibson was quoted on the front page of the W_a_l_l_S_t_r_e_e_t

J_o_u_r_n_a_l (June 26,

1987) in an article about liposuction (a form of cosmetic surgery) in which he "speculated that if cosmetic surgery becomes more widespread, 'we'll see a strange kind of pop-Darwinism take hold; we'll start seeing the same faces over and over, [conforming to] fashion, a kind of

Barbie-doll effect'" (shades of Silverberg and Varley, who suggested

this long ago, but were n_o_t interviewed by the W_a_l_l_S_t_r_e_e_t

J_o_u_r_n_a_l). In spite of all the attention paid to this new sub-genre, however, no one is getting rich from it. In fact, the market may even be waning, as more and more readers decide that the novels themselves are "Barbie-doll" clones of each other. Cyberpunk has even reached the stage of self-satirization, with Marc Laidlaw's "Neuromancer" as an obvious example and Pat Cadigan's and Kelly's own satires more subtle ones (so subtle, in fact, that they are often not recognized as such). Little of the "pharmaceutical-quality stuff," to quote Kelly, is being written these days.

Ziesing presented the opinion that cyberpunk was a pre-meditated phenomenon, a connivance foisted upon the science fiction readership. It was pointed out that the characters in most cyberpunk stories are shallow, members of the under-class, and not the sort upon which a society could be based. Therefore, most cyberpunk stories give the reader a very limited perspective on the "cyberpunk" future. Cyberpunk was also described (I believe by Ziesing) as the "Bruce Springsteen [phenomenon] of science fiction," with flashy popular appeal and not totally without merit, but not the sub-genre to seek deep meaning within.

I skipped the 11:00 AM interview with Gene Wolfe to try to check in, but was told it was still too early. I must admit that although he is lauded as perhaps the best writer in the science fiction field today, Gene Wolfe is not my cup of tea. But as a speaker he is quite good, and I did catch the tail end of the interview.

"What I Read That's Terrific but Not Fantastic"

The noon panel was "What I Read That's Terrific but Not Fantastic"--in other words, non-science-fiction books that science fiction fans might enjoy. The panelists and audience mentioned a variety of books. Michael Swanwick recommended Amos Tutuola's P_a_l_m_W_i_n_e_D_r_i_n_k_a_r_d and Tete-Michel Kpomassie's A_n_A_f_r_i_c_a_n_i_n_G_r_e_e_n_l_a_n_d. He also said that since science fiction readers like "garish and brightly colored" literature, we might try Jerzy Kosinski's P_a_i_n_t_e_d_B_i_r_d and

S_t_e_p_s, though he emphasized that Kosinski certainly had more substantial

merits as well. Steven Popkes described David Lindsay's _ A _ V _ o _ y _ a _ g _ e _ t _ o
_ A _ r _ c _ t _ u _ r _ u _ s as a half-failed masterpiece: a failure of style, but a
brilliant vision and Samuel Delany's _ D _ a _ h _ l _ g _ r _ e _ n as the converse: the
vision failed, but the style remains. Richard Bowker recommended
Anthony Burgess, John Fowles, Vladimir Nabokov, John Cheever, and Graham
Greene. Other recommendations included Donald Barthelme's _ S _ a _ d _ n _ e _ s _ s,
G. K. Chesterton's "Man Who Knew Too Much" stories, C. S. Forester's
"Hornblower" books, George MacDonald Fraser's "Flashman" novels, Len
Deighton's thrillers, the novels of Tony Hillerman, and Robert Van
Gulik's "Judge Dee" mysteries. Elissa Malcohn (I believe) suggested
Read's _ F _ l _ i _ g _ h _ t _ t _ o _ C _ a _ n _ a _ d _ a, a sort of odd book in which Lincoln's
assassination is carried live on TV and slaves flee to Canada on jets,
but it is supposedly not an alternate history. (Sorry, I didn't catch
the author's first name and it's not listed in _ B _ o _ o _ k _ s _ i _ n _ P _ r _ i _ n _ t _.)

Shakespeare Signs for Next Three "Romeo and Juliets": Art vs. Economics

Craig Shaw Gardner moderated a panel which comprised him, Martha
Millard, James Morrow, Melissa Scott, D. Alexander Smith, and Terri
Winding (editor of the Ace Books science fiction line). Not much new
was said (at least I have no notes of startling revelations). I think
everyone concedes at this point that series sell. They must--my latest
stack of four review books includes the seventh "Robotech" book and
another "Sector General" novel by James White.

Literature? Who? Us? Since When?

As an example of the seriousness with which the panelists took
their responsibilities at this convention, Scott Edelman, who moderated
this 1:00 PM panel, had prepared a hand-out of pertinent quotes from
Robin Scott Wilson, Gene Wolfe, Kurt Vonnegut, and many others. Wolfe's
quote is interesting in that it is the antithesis of Heinlein's advice
to aspiring authors. Heinlein recommends that authors always send out
what they write; nothing should sit in the desk. Wolfe says: "I don't
think that for any reason except dire economic necessity a writer ought
to send out material merely because it's salable. I think he hurts
himself; he hurts the field; he hurts the publication in which the
material appears. Mere salability is the ethics of a K-Mart. I think
writing is an art, and without trying to be too pretentious, I think it
ought to have a better set of ethics than an army/navy store."

The panel consisted of Edelman, Jeffrey A. Carver, David
G. Hartwell, Arthur D. Hlavaty, and Gene Wolfe. Hartwell started the
discussion off by pointing out that in the year that Nathaniel Hawthorne
published _ T _ h _ e _ S _ c _ a _ r _ l _ e _ t _ L _ e _ t _ t _ e _ r, the big best-seller was
_ F _ e _ r _ n _ L _ e _ a _ v _ e _ s _ f _ r _ o _ m
_ F _ a _ n _ n _ y _ s _ P _ o _ r _ t _ f _ o _ l _ i _ o by Fanny Fern. So much for best-sellerdom being
a
measure of lasting value. There was some discussion of "what is art?"-
-the reader is directed to C. S. Lewis's book _ A _ n _ E _ x _ p _ e _ r _ i _ m _ e _ n _ t _ i _ n
_ C _ r _ i _ t _ i _ c _ i _ s _ m
for a better accounting than I can give of most of the arguments.
Several panel members felt that clarity and vividness were important

characteristics of "art." This led to the question of whether an author can ever be sure her/his reader will understand precisely what s/he is trying to say. Wolfe gave the example of the word "scan," which does

_ n_ o_ t mean to examine cursorily, but rather to examine closely. Even if the author uses the correct word, will the reader recognize it? Wolfe had a particular distaste for the _ M_ e_ r_ r_ i_ a_ m_ _ W_ e_ b_ s_ t_ e_ r _ D_ i_ c_ t_ i_ o_ n_ a_ r_ y, touting instead the _ O_ x_ f_ o_ r_ d_ E_ n_ g_ l_ i_ s_ h_ D_ i_ c_ t_ i_ o_ n_ a_ r_ y. (Nice, but can everyone afford it?)

Hartwell gave the example of the opening paragraphs of Poul Anderson's _ Q_ u_ e_ e_ n_ o_ f_ A_ i_ r_ a_ n_ d_ D_ a_ r_ k_ n_ e_ s_ s as something which considered "art." He also cited Hartwell's First Law of Horror: "I appreciate art wherever I find it, but I dislike having horror performed upon me to no purpose." As an example of the latter, he suggested Barry Malzberg's _ B_ e_ y_ o_ n_ d_ A_ p_ o_ l_ l_ o, although conceding that the picture of America's space program in it might be becoming more and more accurate.

Wolfe felt that the teaching of literature today in this country was, by and large, a racket. (I am slightly paraphrasing here, I believe.) The result, he said, was that the new generation of readers, or rather non-readers, being produced by the schools was unable to appreciate art or even to recognize it.

The Hero as Gene Wolfe

We skipped this panel--man does not live by bread alone, but a slice once in a while helps. And since I had not read many novels by Wolfe (and only one of the "Book of the New Sun" tetralogy) this seemed like the best time to grab lunch.

Out of Obscurity

Moderated by Craig Shaw Gardner with David G. Hartwell, Ellen Kushner, and Mark Ziesner as members, this panel seemed to have the purpose of providing a "suggested reading list" of obscure science fiction and fantasy (even some horror was mentioned, though in general it still the forgotten child of the genre of the fantastic). The

following books and authors were recommended (a brief description is included if one was given):

- Robert Aickman's ghost stories
- John Bellairs's fiction, both young adult books and such novels as
_ T_ h_ e_ F_ a_ c_ e_ i_ n_ t_ h_ e_ F_ r_ o_ s_ t
- Ramsey Campbell's _ D_ o_ l_ l_ T_ h_ a_ t_ A_ t_ t_ e_ H_ i_ s_ M_ o_ t_ h_ e_ r
- the novels of D. G. Compton, who could not make a living writing
literary science fiction and now has a job condensing books for
_ R_ e_ a_ d_ e_ r_ s'_ _ D_ i_ g_ e_ s_ t
- Peter Dickinson's young adult fiction
- John Ferris's _ A_ l_ l_ H_ e_ a_ d_ s_ T_ u_ r_ n_ W_ h_ e_ n_ t_ h_ e
_ H_ u_ n_ t_ G_ o_ e_ s_ B_ y
- John M. Ford's works, especially _ T_ h_ e_ D_ r_ a_ g_ o_ n_ W_ a_ i_ t_ i_ n_ g (I
hadn't realized this was obscure)

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- Russell Griffin's _ B_ l_ i_ n_ d_ M_ e_ n_ a_ n_ d_ t_ h_ e
_ E_ l_ e_ p_ h_ a_ n_ t
- M. John Harrison's _ S_ t_ o_ r_ m_ o_ f_ W_ i_ n_ g_ s (described as "literary sword &
sorcery")
- Georgette Heyer's novels, which Ellen Kushner described as "Jane
Austen with bubbles"
- Crockett Johnson's "Barnaby" books
- Gwyneth Jones's _ E_ s_ c_ a_ p_ e_ P_ l_ a_ n_ s (written in some acronymic language
which requires that you read the book twice to understand it--it
sounds like the _ C_ o_ d_ e_ x_ S_ e_ r_ a_ p_ h_ i_ n_ i_ u_ s to me) and
_ D_ i_ v_ i_ n_ e_ E_ n_ d_ u_ r_ a_ n_ c_ e,
about an immortal android cat wandering through southeast Asia ten
thousand years in the future
- David Langford's _ S_ p_ a_ c_ e_ E_ a_ t_ e_ r
- Richard Matheson's _ H_ e_ l_ l_ H_ o_ u_ s_ e and other works
- Christopher Priest's novels (mostly unavailable in this country)
- Keith Roberts's works
- Sarban's works, especially _ T_ h_ e_ S_ o_ u_ n_ d_ o_ f_ H_ i_ s_ H_ o_ r_ n
- Hilbert Schenck's books, especially _ W_ a_ v_ e_ R_ i_ d_ e_ r and "Steambird" (an
alternate history story). (I would also recommend "The Geometry of
Narrative.")
- Jack Sharkey's _ I_ t'_ s_ M_ a_ g_ i_ c_ ,_ Y_ o_ u_ D_ o_ p_ e
- Robert Stallman's "Orphan" series (_ T_ h_ e_ O_ r_ p_ h_ a_ n_ , _ T_ h_ e

_ C _ a _ p _ t _ i _ v _ e, and _ T _ h _ e
_ B _ e _ a _ s _ t)

- Ian Watson's novels (mostly unavailable in this country)
- Charles Whitmore's _ W _ i _ n _ t _ e _ r _ s _ D _ a _ u _ g _ h _ t _ e _ r (written in the style of a Norse saga)
- Lawrence Yep's young adult fiction
- "Love and Rockets" comics
- _ T _ h _ e _ D _ r _ e _ a _ m _ D _ r _ a _ g _ o _ n _ s (I didn't catch the author's name)

Now you can all run out and try to find these books!

Gene Wolfe's Guest of Honor Speech

Gene Wolfe began his speech by announcing that since this convention was dedicated to the written word, he had written his speech and would read it, rather than working from notes. He began by quoting Mark Twain: "The man who does not read good books is no better than the man who cannot." (I tried to find out where this quote came from. Bartlett's doesn't list it. I did find one that might be appropriate for Readercon in general: "A classic is something everybody wants to have read and nobody wants to read.") He then spoke of having recently purchased an edition of Washington Irving's _ T _ h _ e _ A _ l _ h _ a _ m _ b _ r _ a printed in 1890 and well-cared for since then (by its appearance), and discovering when he read it that only the first fifty pages or so had been split. Why did the previous owner read that far and then stop? Wolfe discounted the idea that he had no time to finish it--after all, there must have been a blizzard or an illness or _ s _ o _ m _ e spare time--or that he lost interest--since it was an interesting part. Wolfe then took a look at how literacy developed as a result of people wanting to read first the _ B _ i _ b _ l _ e, and then later books such as _ P _ i _ l _ g _ r _ i _ m _ s _ P _ r _ o _ g _ r _ e _ s _ s and other moral tracts. "Pleasure reading" was not something there was time for; there

were crops to be harvested, meals to be cooked, clothes to be washed. And Wolfe felt that the previous owner of _ T _ h _ e _ A _ l _ h _ a _ m _ b _ r _ a must have still believed this and stopped because he was enjoying it too much.

All this is an interesting theory, but there are other possibilities. It's possible that the previous owner didn't find the particular passage as interesting as Wolfe. It's possible that he ran

out of spare time for some period of time and then had lost interest in the book.

Wolfe ended with a plea to us to make reading acceptable again. He spoke of how people who read, at least those who read something other than the current best-seller, are regarded as odd somehow. Only by talking about books to other people could we ever make reading acceptable. He made it sound not unlike gays coming out of the closet, and I'm not convinced that the situation vis-a-vis reading is at that stage. Readercon may serve the purpose of allowing fans of literary science fiction to gather to discuss the written word, but that doesn't mean that the fans who don't attend Readercon are not fans of literary science fiction. Many of them are probably fans of a wide variety of science-fiction-related materials in several media and choose to attend conventions that cover all of them rather than focus on a specific one. Since much of what I read says that reading has not declined, has probably in fact increased over the past few years, I think that those who sing the jeremiad of illiteracy may be over-reacting. Wolfe cited statistics indicating between 15 and 20% functional illiteracy in this country--a frightening enough statistic--but then (after quoting Twain) started talking as if the vast majority were illiterate even if they could read, because they did not read "literature." I would make a distinction between one who cannot read "In case of fire break glass" and one who can read but chooses to read the latest "Garfield" book over

_ T_ h_ e_ B_ o_ o_ k_ o_ f_ t_ h_ e_ N_ e_ w_ S_ u_ n. In any era, the percentage of the population that read "great literature" was fairly small. That it still is should surprise no one.

You Can't Tell a Book by Its Cover (packaging and marketing f&sf)

Gary Farber moderated this panel, with J. F. Rivkin (A), J. F. Rivkin (B), Charles C. Ryan, and Terri Windling as members. ("J. F. Rivkin" is the pseudonym of two women who chose to be called "J. F. Rivkin [A]" and "J. F. Rivkin [B]").) I found it extremely annoying, in that the publishers on the panel kept telling us that the cover art was really designed for the distributors' book buyers and not for the readers, that the quotes and blurbs were designed for the distributors' book buyers and not for the readers, and that, in general, the reader came last. Then, when someone from the audience said that what he had discovered was that the blurb "In the style of X" or "Not since Y has such a novel been written" usually meant that the novel was bad, the publishers got upset that he would reject a book because of the cover. They seem to have forgotten in their quest to get the books _ i_ n_ t_ o the bookstores that they must also get them _ o_ u_ t again in the hands of

readers and that they could not count forever on the readers' patience with whatever marketing tricks the publishers think they need. They also seemed to deny the correlation between the blurb and the lack of quality that this person claimed to have discovered. The attitude seems to be that the reader must do all the work and that the publisher has no responsibility for designing a book the reader wants to buy. With an attitude like that, publishers should not be surprised if sales are not all that they expect them to be.

Regarding quotes on covers, Windling explained that the quotes are most likely to come from other authors published by the same publisher. As for the authors who seem to laud half the books on the rack, Windling said there was a name for them: "quote whores."

On the brighter side, there have been success stories in packaging. Ace bought Moorcock's "Elric" books and then was faced with the problem of how to market them to people (readers this time) who already had the novels. They solved this by using cover art dramatically different from the old Michael Whelan covers (in this case, pre-Raphaelite art by Robert Gould) which was so striking as to convince the Moorcock fans out there that they needed to buy this series just for the art. (Well, that was how it was described to us anyway.)

Kirk Poland Memorial Bad Prose Competition

Kirk Poland is the hack author in some science fiction novel whose name and author escape me at the moment. The competition worked like this: a section of bad prose from a published science fiction novel was read to the audience, ending in mid-sentence. Then four possible endings were read--one from each of the panelists (Geary Gravel, Craig Shaw Gardner, and Darrell Schweitzer) and the _ r _ e _ a _ l ending. The audience then voted on which they thought was the real ending. Each author got a point for each member of the audience he fooled; the audience got a point for each vote for the correct ending. The authors "honored" in this competition included Homer Eon Flint and Austin Hall, E. E. Smith, John Norman, L. Ron Hubbard, Stephen Donaldson, Robert Heinlein, and Lin Carter. The final score showed the audience winning, with Geary Gravel coming in second as the pro with the best chance to be a hack author. The only problem with this competition was that "[it] took so long to die. Long after his sword had cut through [its] cold flesh, the heads were sinking their tusks into his bootheels...." Sorry, I got carried away there. Actually that was the correct answer to the last excerpt in the competition and had been offered as a possible answer to all ten. By the next day, it had become the catch-phrase of the convention ("the problem with multi-book series is that they take so long to die...").

Meet the Pros Party/Reception for Mark Ziesing

These were originally scheduled as separate events, but the committee decided (wisely, I think) to combine them. The Con Suite, unfortunately, was rather small for this, since pretty much everyone

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wanted to attend and 280 people in one room, albeit a large one, is a bit tight. The food was good (cheese and raw vegetables as well as chips and nuts), and I did get a chance to talk to most of the other Usenletters who were there. Apparently there was someone else who was trying to meet me, but even in a convention as small as this one, we never managed to connect. Those of us who did gather talked about this year's Worldcon (and the difficulty of paying hotel deposits in pounds), next year's Worldcon (no one knows very much), the 1989 Worldcon (will we have a hotel?), and next year's Boskone (in Springfield, Massachusetts, no less).

Losing Money for Fun & Profit: Small Press How-to

I only caught the tail end of this and heard that W h i s p e r s is considered a success because it loses only \$500-\$1000 per issue. Donald M. Grant, Phantasia Press, and others of that type are considered small "big-press" publishers rather than big "small-press" publishers. Scott Edelman once again had a hand-out, this one much briefer. I suppose how to lose money doesn't require much comment.

Out of Boundaries (great imaginative literature not marketed as f&sf)

Again, this was more a recommended reading list than a panel. Richard Bowker, Gary Farber, James Morrow, and Michael Swanwick did talk somewhat about science fiction novels being marketed as mainstream, but more from the point of view of a science fiction author who crosses over (e.g., Kurt Vonnegut) than of a mainstream author who writes a science fiction novel (e.g., Margaret Atwood's H a n d m a i d ' s T a l e). Morrow must have had a bad night; he claimed that most science fiction fans are kids who play Dungeons and Dragons*, masturbate, and are afraid to try anything new. As a result, he seemed to feel that serious novels published as science fiction would not find their audience. As a result, he was pleased that his own T h i s I s t h e W a y t h e W o r l d E n d s was published "outside the genre." This was perhaps the most obvious manifestation of the negative aspect of Readercon--Snobcon.

The recommendations included several baseball-related alternate histories: Robert Coover's U_n_i_v_e_r_s_a_l_B_a_s_e_b_a_l_l_A_s_s_o_c_i_a_t_i_o_n,_I_n_c./H_e_n_r_y_W_a_u_g_h,_P_r_o_p. and W. P. Kinsella's I_o_w_a_B_a_s_e_b_a_l_l_C_o_n_f_e_d_e_r_a_c_y and S_h_o_e_l_e_s_s_J_o_e. (Coover has also written that great "Victorian" classic, S_p_a_n_k_i_n_g_t_h_e_M_a_i_d. Oh, the marvelous things one can learn from B_o_o_k_s_i_n_P_r_i_n_t!) Latin American authors were well-represented with Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel Garcia Marquez mentioned several times, as well as Marcio Souza's O_r_d_e_r_o_f_t_h_e_D_a_y.

* Dungeons and Dragons is a registered trademark owned by TSR, Inc.

Other cross-over novels which were recommended were:

- Kingsley Amis's A_l_t_e_r_a_t_i_o_n and G_r_e_e_n_M_a_n
- John Calvin Batchelor's B_i_r_t_h_o_f_t_h_e_P_e_o_p_l_e's
R_e_p_u_b_l_i_c_o_f
A_n_t_a_r_c_t_i_c_a
- Richard Bowker's R_e_p_l_i_c_a (authors plugging their own books seemed to be d_e_r_i_g_u_e_u_r)
- Charles Bukowski's "No Way to Paradise" and "Six Inches" (the latter described as a story in which a woman shrinks a man down to six inches in height and then uses him in ways best not elaborated at such a panel)
- John Collier's H_i_s_M_o_n_k_e_y_W_i_f_e and other stories
- Len Deighton's alternate history S_S-G_B
- Peter Dickinson's novels (again)
- Thomas Disch's G_e_t_t_i_n_g_i_n_t_o_D_e_a_t_h
- Umberto Eco's N_a_m_e_o_f_t_h_e_R_o_s_e (it's not entirely clear to me why this was called science fiction)
- John M. Ford's D_r_a_g_o_n_W_a_i_t_i_n_g (also mentioned in the obscure

science fiction panel)

- Denis Johnson's F i s k a d o r o
 - Jeremy Levin's C r e a t o r (said to be much better than the film)
 - Bernard Malamud's N a t u r a l
 - Ted Mooney's E a s y T r a v e l t o O t h e r
- P l a n e t s
- Vladimir Nabokov's A d a
 - Thomas Pynchon's novels
 - Philip Roth's G r e a t A m e r i c a n N o v e l
 - David Slavitt's O u t e r M o n g o l i a n
 - Nancy Willard's T h i n g s I n v i s i b l e t o S e e
 - Eugene Zamiatin's W e
 - G r e e n C a s t l e (I didn't get the author's name and it's not in

B o o k s

- i n P r i n t)
- T h e S c e n t o f N e w - M o w n H a y (again, I didn't get the author's name and it's not in B o o k s i n P r i n t)

None of the panelists even mentioned Atwood's book (though when it was brought up in two panels on Saturday, each time the moderator said that this panel on Sunday would cover just such books), so when I got a

chance to "testify" I mentioned it, as well as Mark Helprin's W i n t e r' s T a l e, Russell Hoban's P i l g e r m a n and other novels, Knebel Fletcher's S e v e n D a y s i n M a y, and the novels of Dennis Wheatley.

Alternate Histories We'd Like to See

This was the panel I was most looking forward to. After such anticipation, it was almost inevitable that I would be somewhat disappointed. My disappointment stemmed from two sources. One was the emphasis on how to bring about an alternate history--whether Germany could have marched through a different battlefield in World War I and how the various generals arranged their troops, or whether Philip Sydney might have become King of Poland (Melissa Scott mentioned this one)--without ever getting to what such an alternate history would look like.

Darrell Schweitzer's idea of having a Roman Emperor convert to Judaism rather than Christianity and so form the Jewish Roman Empire showed more promise, but no one wanted to follow up on it. The other problem was

the way the panel kept cutting off ideas from the audience, rather than following through on them. Okay, so maybe the question of what sort of alternate world would we have if air conditioning hadn't been invented (to take one example) may not be the most viscerally exciting, but to tell the proposer of this idea that it doesn't make any sense does seem a little abrupt, especially since when someone asked about rules for alternate histories, Steven Popkes replied, "Rules in an alternate history? That's like rules in a knife fight!" You can't have it both ways.

There was a brief summary of the two conflicting historical theories that need to be understood before one can deal with alternate histories: the Great-Man Theory versus the Tide-of-Events Theory. The former says that single individuals determine history--kill Napoleon and a very different present emerges. The latter says that individuals are like obstacles in a rushing river--they cause a brief change in the flow, but that soon is wiped out and the river continues on its course. Adding or removing a single boulder does not change the course of the river very far downstream; kill Napoleon and someone else appears to take his place. Michael Moorcock's B_e_h_o_l_d_t_h_e_M_a_n might very well be considered the prime example of this, though there is another story than makes this point even more firmly. In that, someone goes back in time to prevent someone else from being shot in the head. Each time he tries, the "tide of events" overcomes his efforts. Finally, when he thinks he's covered everything, a meteorite comes crashing through a window, killing the victim and leaving a hole in his head that looks just like a bullet hole. (I wish I could remember the name or author of that story!)

There was some discussion of the more popular events to play with. Someone mentioned the Black Death. Robert Silverberg's G_a_t_e_o_f_W_o_r_l_d_s postulates a world in which the Black Death killed 75% of Europe's population instead of 25-33%. Popkes mentioned a part of Poland that seemed to be spared the Black Death and could easily have become the basis for the Holy Polish Empire.

Darrell Schweitzer took the opportunity to plug his alternate history (not even written yet) in which an immortal Alexander the Great is involved in Aztec-occupied Spain in 1914. Apparently the Aztecs are trying to build a Quetzalcoatl zeppelin using ostrich feathers. This, according to Schweitzer, is applying the "silly factor" in alternate histories.

Somtow Suchartikul's "Aquiliad" series was mentioned and there was some discussion of alternate histories based on changes to United States history, but on the whole this did not seem as fertile an area as European, Asian, or African histories. European history has been done often; the alternate histories I'd like to see would be based on changes

in Asian or African history. What if the Chinese had been less isolationist? What if the Mahdi had succeeded in 1885? What if Islam had not been driven out of Spain? (All right, so the last is European also.)

At 1:00 PM we moved into the overflow room, where we broke up into a number of small groups, one discussing what would have happened if Josephus hadn't betrayed the Jewish uprising in 66 AD/CE, one discussing the battle plans of the Germans on the Russian Front in World War II, one discussing how the weather affected World War I. This was more what I was looking for, and I hope that attendance next year justifies having discussion groups in addition to panels.

In Search of the 'Literary' Hard SF Novel

Because of the overflow on the previous panel, by the time I would have gotten to this one it was almost done, so we went to lunch instead.

Academic Attention: Good, Bad, or Ugly?

Again, I would have been interested, but Readercon didn't have a lunch break, so we had to make do.

What Will We Write About Next?

We arrived after the panel started. Ellen Kushner was saying that as people had moved to the suburbs, there was a trend toward more pastoral settings for science fiction and fantasy. (Ah, yes, "tree science fiction." There was Anthony's I_n_t_h_e_S_h_a_d_e_o_f_t_h_e_T_r_e_e and Knight's M_a_n_i_n_t_h_e_T_r_e_e and Niven's I_n_t_e_g_r_a_l_T_r_e_e_s and Dick's T_h_e[S]_a_p_G_u_n...that last one was Mark's idea--blame him.) Now, as people return to the cities, urban settings are showing up more and more. This was interesting as a counter-point to Mark's recent comments on the dearth of urban horror films. D. Alexander Smith said he wanted to see more political-warning novels, which led to a heated discussion of "message books." (I think it was Samuel Goldwyn who said, "If you want to deliver a message, send a telegram.")

People also expected to see more books about world-wide plagues because of the recent awareness about AIDS. Scott Green expects an influx of ideas from the comic book field, and everyone expected more and more near-future novels marketed as non-science-fiction.

Exceptions to the Rule (f&sf excellence in other media)

This panel, more than any of the others, emphasized the "Snobcon" aspect of Readercon. When one of the panelists started out by saying there were two questions to be answered--was there excellent science fiction in media other than the written word, and why not?--I knew this was a kangaroo court. Most of the time was spent discussing how badly Hollywood adapts written science fiction to film (or television, for

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that matter). No one mentioned that when science fiction authors adapt films to the written word (i.e., write novelizations), they do equally poorly. If it's true, as one person claimed, that "Hollywood has no respect for the written word," it's also true that novelists have no respect for Hollywood.

Granting for the moment that science fiction novels (and shorter works) have not been adapted well into film, what does that have to do with the quality of Hollywood or with its ability to create good science fiction works? Film is n o t the written word; to measure it against the same yardstick is foolish. One could just as easily claim that the written word is inferior to music because no one has ever captured the feeling of a symphony in words. Every medium has its strengths and weaknesses--perhaps the worst aspect of Hollywood filmmaking is that it feels a need to translate the written word to the screen. There are scenes in T h e K i l l i n g F i e l d s, for example, that are far more powerful visually than they could ever be in print. And no story has moved me in quite the same way as Beethoven's N i n t h S y m p h o n y. Does this mean the written word is inferior? Of course not. A hammer does a poor job of screwing in screws, and a screwdriver is equally poor at driving nails. Just as the carpenter must learn to choose the right tool, so must the artist. I'm not saying that an artist must master all fields, but an artist in one area should be willing to acknowledge the value of other areas also. Do plumbers insist on wiring their own houses, and electricians on installing their own plumbing?

What makes this attitude of the written word as Procrustean bed especially baffling is the acceptance of some visual media as "equal" to the written word. Readercon plans to have an art show at some time in the future, and other conventions, while decrying "the media fans," seem

to accept paintings, sculptures, and other static visual media as acceptable. Boskone, which is working very hard on cutting back on "media," has a list of qualifications for being allowed to join (you need to meet only one of them, not all) and one is that you have purchased something in the art show from one of the last three Boskones.

"Medium (pl. media): a mode of artistic expression or communication." Let's not forget that books are media as surely as films or music or costumes. To those who say, "Well, yes, there are good science fiction films, but most of what Hollywood turns out is terrible. Look at the schlock they pass off as science fiction!" I would remind them that Sturgeon's Law applies. For every Dino de Laurentiis there is a Terry Brooks; for every Gene Wolfe, there is a Nicholas Roeg.

After they had finished blasting film, the panelists then talked about all the wonderful comic books around and how there was so much that you could do in a comic that you couldn't do in the written word. The inconsistency of this struck them not at all.

Miscellaneous

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The Program Book was small, but managed to contain the obligatory biographies and bibliographies. Its slimness was due more to fewer advertisements than to a major decrease in content over other program books. Also included was a copy of the Disclave 1987 Program Book--apparently WSFA had a surplus and since it included a short story by Gene Wolfe (their Guest of Honor also), they offered the extras to Readercon. It also contained an article on "Science Fiction and the History of British Films," perhaps inappropriate for Readercon, but interesting nonetheless.

Other "freebies" included the fourth issue of L_a_s_t_ W_a_v_e ("The Last Best Hope of Speculative Fiction"--since I haven't had a chance to read it yet, I can't say if it's true or not) and an issue of T_h_e_ L_i_t_t_l_e_ M_a_g_a_z_i_n_e, a poetry magazine.

Summary

All in all, Readercon was like Classic Boskone--not Boskone of five

years ago, but Boskone of fifteen years ago. It was small and friendly. There was no enormous assembly line of people at Gene Wolfe's autograph session--he had time to talk to the people who wanted his autograph, and they had time to talk to him. In fact, he was the most accessible and hard-working Guest of Honor I've seen in a long time; he was on five or six program items and could often be seen in the audience at others, unlike many Guests of Honor who give their speech, do their autograph session and seem to spend the rest of their time in their hotel room.

There were no false fire alarms, no all-night gonzo parties in the elevator (there was only one elevator and it was sufficient), no bands of roving under-ages "fans" looking for free booze. It had its problems, true, but it was overall good enough that Mark and I have already joined for next year. It was an inspiration to go back and actually read science fiction. So what was the first book I read after Readercon? _ B _ i _ m _ b _ o _ s _ o _ f _ t _ h _ e _ D _ e _ a _ t _ h _ S _ u _ n, that's what.

But that's another story.

Monmouth County Library Foreign Film Series

The following is the schedule for the Monmouth County Library

Foreign Film Series shown Mondays 7:30 PM at the Monmouth County Library Headquarters in Manalapan (125 Symmes Drive, Manalapan, NJ 07726). All films are sub-titled. This schedule is provided as a service.

- July 13 WHEN FATHER WAS AWAY ON BUSINESS (Yugoslavia)
(Winner, Best Film,
1 985 Cannes Film Festival)
- July 20 MEPHISTO (West Germany)
(Winner, Best Foreign Film,
1981 Cannes Film Festival)
- July 27 TIME STANDS STILL (Hungary)
- August 3 A SLAVE OF LOVE (U.S.S.R.)
- August 10 THE MAD ADVENTURES OF RABBI JACOB (France)

