

1. Of the next Lincroft discussion book, Charlie Harris writes:

WHEN GRAVITY FAILS, by George Alec Effinger, is a 1940's detective yarn set in the sleaziest section of a 22nd century Arab city.

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Most of the inhabitants have had their brains wired to accept plug-in modules that temporarily supply specialized knowledge, supernatural body functions, or even a complete new personality--one character "chips in" a "moddie" and becomes a living, shooting James Bond. In addition to brain modifications, body modifications are also carried to extremes. This is a book in which the neologism "s/he" would apply literally: many of the characters have had total sex-change makeovers, good enough on occasion to fool even the narrator, who prides himself on being able to size up a passerby and explain, "Oh, her? She's a female-to-male sex change in drag." The narrator is a holdout who has had neither brain nor body mods, but who compensates in part with an intensive and varied regimen of superpills as he stalks a killer (or is it more than one?) who is disposing of the narrator's friends and acquaintances either neatly (a small-caliber bullet through the caste mark) or very messily indeed.

This is, I suppose, cyberpunk--engrossing but not very pretty. It's well written, but not a "fair" mystery: most of the revelations are not anchored in previously-revealed clues (unless I missed them all). The Arab Muslim milieu adds appropriate elements of strangeness and occasions for sardonic humor.

WHEN GRAVITY FAILS will be the subject for discussion at the LZ club meeting on Wednesday, September 28. Join us and explain what the title means (it's from Bob Dylan's "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues": "When you're lost in the rain in Juarez and it's Eastertime too/And your gravity fails and negativity don't pull you through..."). [-xchar]

2. Well, South Africa and apartheid are in the news. Two fairly well-matched films on the subject are THE WILBY CONSPIRACY and CRY FREEDOM! The first is an adventure film with a heavy dose of politics; the second is a political film with a heavy dose of

adventure. They will be shown on Thursday night, September 29 at 7 PM.

Apartheid and Adventure

THE WILBY CONSPIRACY (1975) dir. by Ralph Nelson

CRY FREEDOM! (1987) dir. by Richard Attenborough

Frankly I am at a loss to know why THE WILBY CONSPIRACY is not a more popular film. It has a very solid cast, including Michael Caine and Sidney Poitier, a terrific Nicol Williamson performance, and the first acting appearance of Rutger Hauer. Complacent liberal Caine and activist Poitier find themselves running from dogged police inspector Williamson. Along the way all of Caine's complacency falls away as he gets a better look at the political system. CRY FREEDOM! deals with the issues at a more basic level but THE WILBY CONSPIRACY actually has the better script.

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CRY FREEDOM! is also about a fair-weather liberal who finds commitment to the anti-apartheid movement through acquaintance with an activist. In this case, however, the story is true (well, mostly true). CRY FREEDOM! tells how a journalist meets and gets to know Stephen Biko and how he risks his life and gives up almost everything he owns to get Biko's story to a country that will publish it.

3. I talked last week about the bigoted attitude of physicists that all photons are alike. This piece of macro-chauvinism, the attitude that all photons are the same, seems to come largely from the photon's inability to stay in one place long enough to defend itself. Photons tend to be much more nomadic than, say, neutrons. They always seem to feel that after an instant of time in one place it's time to pick up and move on. They do this with such regularity that the speed of light is considered constant all over the universe. Quarks tend to group together like protons and neutrons and form communities that are relatively stable, but you just can't tie a photon down. As far as we can tell, there is a great deal of friction among subatomic particles because photons just never put down roots.

Photons do tend to be the bad boys of the subatomic community. A lot of them seem to drive so fast that they cannot help bashing into other particles and busting them all to pieces. I guess there is some sort of deep-seated urge to go out in a blaze of glory as a gamma ray. It should be noted that very few photons are insured.

4. I said in my con report last week that this zine "may not look very pretty compared to some, but it comes out weekly. I can't spend a lot of time doing layout, because when Friday morning comes, that zine has to hit the mailbox." And, as if to emphasize my point, I followed this with a table that hadn't been formatted.

The formatted table follows here:

ZINE	PUBLISHER	FREQUENCY	PRIMARY MEDIUM	SECONDARY MEDIUM	LAYOUT
MT. VOID	Leeper	weekly	paper	electronic	medium
OTHER REALMS	Von Rospach	quarterly	paper	electronic	high
SF-LOVERS	Jaffe	tri-daily	electronic	paper	low

Life conspires against me! [-ecl]

5. The following books have been donated to the Holmdel branch of the library by Lawrence Beshear:

Cherryh, C. J.	HUNTER OF WORLDS
Heinlein, Robert A.	JOB: A COMEDY OF JUSTICE
Niven, Larry & Barnes, Steven	DREAM PARK
Niven, Larry et al	THE LEGACY OF HEOROT
Van Scyoc, Sydney J.	CLOUD CRY

6. World SF convention update information:

Noreascon III will be held in Boston August 31 through September 4, 1989. The address is Noreascon Three, Box 46, MIT Branch P.O., Cambridge MA 02139. E-mail address is att!decvax!cca!ringwld!noreascon3. The current rate for attending membership is \$70.

ConFiction will be held in The Hague, The Netherlands, August 23 through 27, 1990 (the weekend b_e_f_o_r_e Labor Day). The U.S. agent is

Marc S. Glasser, P. O. Box 1252, Bowling Green Station, New York NY 10274. E-mail address is (until 1 Oct 88) att!mcvax!hasara5.bitnet!u00254. After 1 Oct 88, you can try att!mcvax!hutruu0.bitnet!wnnroub. The current rate for attending membership is \$65.

Chicon V will be held in Chicago August 29 through September 3, 1991. The registration address is Chicon V Registration, P. O. Box 219121, Arlinton OH 43221; the general address is Chicon V, P. O. Box A3120, Chicago IL 60690. There is no announced e-mail address. The current rate for attending membership is \$50. [-ecl]

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

BETRAYED

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: One of Costa-Gavras's lesser efforts, B_e_t_r_a_y_e_d replaces telling a true story with telling an action adventure made up of possibly realistic elements. FBI undercover agent gets the goods on a white supremacist group in a plot that generally follows Hitchcock's N_o_t_o_r_i_o_u_s. Rating: +1.

Costa-Gavras makes political thrillers. They always have a very left-wing slant and very often he makes the United States government the villain. Still, his films usually get a decent following in this country and films like Z and M_i_s_s_i_n_g have a near-classic status. Others, like the extremely shrill S_t_a_t_e_o_f_S_i_e_g_e, may get shown but probably generate less interest. Costa-Gavras usually makes films that have a sort of docu-drama feel, basing them on actual incidents. B_e_t_r_a_y_e_d, Costa-Gavras's new film, is very atypical of his films, enough so that it is difficult to believe that this is also a Costa-Gavras film. First, the docu-drama feel is gone. B_e_t_r_a_y_e_d is not intended to be taken as a true story, only to have situations that are realistic in character and which have been rearranged to tell a story. (One wonders if that might not be how a Greek views Z, which in this country people generally view as being only a slightly fictionalized account.) The second major divergence is that, at least superficially, the U.S. government really are the heroes of B_e_t_r_a_y_e_d. The villains are the extreme right-wing that is trying to organize itself in rural parts of this country. And even among the villains there seem to be gradations of nastiness. They all seem to be likable family men and farmers with a Jekyll-Hyde edge to them. We find out that the bigot who is the film's chief villain hates blacks and Jews but perhaps nearly as much he hates neo-Nazis and you find yourself almost liking him when he tears into these supposed allies.

The film opens with San Kraus's radio show in Chicago. Kraus (played by Richard Libertini) has the style of defending causes of tolerance, not with reason but by being as insulting as possible to anyone who disagrees with him. One listener, whom he has previously determined is overweight, he tells he will not listen to her arguments until she loses fifty pounds. This is apparently the style that makes him popular. We feel a little shock and not much loss when we see Kraus gunned down in a parking garage.

Flash to the wheat fields of Illinois where country-girl-from-out-of-town Katie Phillips (played by Debra Winger) meets and falls for handsome farmer Gary Simmons (played by Tom Berenger). That is the plot for a slow half-hour. Finally, we are told that Phillips is an undercover agent for the FBI trying to root out white supremacists and

shortly after that all the nice country people we have met start revealing to Phillips that they are white supremacists and that they kill blacks for sport. Well, that is it. She has the goods. Right? Wrong! Her control wants her to get in deeper and deeper and to get evidence for more and more serious crimes. The rest of the film follows a predictable course in a plot that dirties everyone it touches: the supremacists, the FBI, even the kids. Along the way we see white supremacist "hunting," a jamboree where white supremacist groups of all sorts get together and camp in happy brotherhood and teach the kids how to shoot blacks and Jews. The plot gets more and more fanciful as it goes along. One realizes eventually that individual scenes in the film may be based on real incidents but the plot as a whole is invented. And that is disappointing. Costa-Gavras could have done a docu-drama like M_i_s_s_i_n_g or Z and instead made an action film like so many other filmmakers do. B_e_t_r_a_y_e_d is no more hard-hitting than the very similar I_n_t_o_t_h_e_H_o_m_e_l_a_n_d made for cable over the past year. Rate B_e_t_r_a_y_e_d a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

CROSSING DELANCY
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: Well-above-average comedy/drama reminiscent of M_o_o_n_s_t_r_u_c_k but set in the Jewish community of Manhattan. Some nice characterizations in this story of a 33-year-old career woman's relationships with two men. Rating: +2.

It has been a good long while since my wife and I have found ourselves to be the youngest people in an audience, but we did with C_r_o_s_s_i_n_g_D_e_l_a_n_c_y and that in itself is a testimonial that the filmmaker

must be doing something right. And she is. Joan Micklin Silver has directed a warm, human sort of comedy that is at least comparable to M_o_o_n_s_t_r_u_c_k and at least in some ways better.

Isabelle Grossman (played by Amy Irving) is 33 and has a fulfilling career. Working in a very literary bookstore. She arranges for public readings by very good authors, she runs book discussion groups, she lies to her grandmother that she does not mind being single, and she knows many important people in the publishing field. Working hard at her job, it is late at night before she gets back to her big, empty apartment. Knowing many major literary figures, perhaps some day she will have a lasting relationship with one or perhaps even marry one. Her closest

relative, her grandmother, calls in a matchmaker for Isabelle, much to Isabelle's embarrassment. And who does the matchmaker suggest? A pickle salesman, Sam Posner (played by Peter Riegart of A n i m a l H o u s e and L o c a l H e r o). Well, he is sort of a nice guy, he has a good sense of humor, he obviously would like very much to get to know Isabelle, he even can make sound romantic his reasons for letting a matchmaker bring him together with Isabelle. But he is just a pickle salesman after all, and Isabelle really has her eye on a tall, handsome Dutch author, Anton Maes (played by Jeroen Krabbe). Deep down, Isabelle knows that Maes will never have time for her and that he really is not as great a writer as many think him to be. But he certainly seems like a better catch than a pickle salesman. If only she can find a good way to brush off Sam without feeling too guilty.

Based on the 1985 play by Susan Sandler has a terrific character portraits. Bubbie (i.e., Grandmother) Kantor (played by Reizl Bozyk) is a wonderful combination of endearing and exasperating. The matchmaker (played by Sylvia Miles) fits the stereotype of the pushy, obnoxious matchmaker, but then what sort of person becomes a matchmaker anyway? Isabelle herself is a little flat as a character and it takes her a long time to realize what the audience knew long before.

C r o s s i n g D e l a n c y has some totally superfluous revealing clothing and explicit sexual language, but the MPAA double-crossed the film and still gave it a PG. Do not confuse it with a children's film. Rate it +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

JUST IMAGINE
(seen at Nolacon II)
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: This is not a particularly good film. It is more of a curio of the science fiction film than a genuine entertainment experience. But visually it is very interesting and historically it is the forerunner of several bad science fiction films of the 1950s. Look for several familiar props like Flash Gordon's spaceship.
Rating: 0.

I am to the point now where I have seen the vast majority of the good science fiction films. It has been a long time since I have seen a science fiction film I have never seen before that is more than eighteen months old, and that is a film to be really enthusiastic about. With that in mind, I did not have high expectations for J_u_s_t_I_m_a_g_i_n_e. I guess that explains why of a group of five of us who went to see the film as a group, I was the only one who really thought the film was worth defending.

J_u_s_t_I_m_a_g_i_n_e is a 1930 American comedy, apparently inspired in part by M_e_t_r_o_p_o_l_i_s. The film starts by showing how different 1930 was from 1880, then proceeds to tell a story set in a 1980 as far advanced from 1930 as 1930 was over 1880. Airplanes are as common in the skies over the city as cars used to be in the streets, but these planes have fans in the wings to allow them to travel slowly or even just hover while the passengers walk on the wings. Some changes were not far off the mark. Rather than towels, sinks come equipped with electric hand driers. To give the audience someone of their own time to identify with, we have a man revived from fifty years of suspended animation brought on by a lightning strike. The actor, and as I remember character, had been a sort of vaudeville comic. He became a device for explaining the sights we see, but the main character is a 1980 pilot who must, in a court of law, prove himself more worthy of the girl he loves than another man is. The court considers a newspaper publisher more worthy, so our hero agrees to pilot the first spaceship to Mars. And what is on Mars?

Beautiful women. Yup, this is the forerunner of films such as C_a_t_W_o_m_e_n_o_f_t_h_e_M_o_o_n, A_b_b_o_t_t_a_n_d_C_o_s_t_e_l_l_o_G_o_t_o_M_a_r_s, M_i_s_s_i_l_e_t_o_t_h_e_M_o_o_n, and

Q_u_e_e_n_o_f_O_u_t_e_r_S_p_a_c_e. I cannot claim to be that keen on the descendents

of this film, but for a 1930 film, J_u_s_t_I_m_a_g_i_n_e is not too shabby. Rate it a flat 0 on the -4 to +4 scale. I am glad I finally saw it.

MIDNIGHT MOVIE MASSACRE

(seen at Nolacon II)

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: Neither competent enough to be fun nor incompetent enough to be funny. Approximately one hundred attempted pieces of humor. About two work. Same fail spectacularly. Rating: -3.

Wade Williams is a well-known fan of 1950s science fiction movies and television. Of late, when you see 1950s science fiction television shows turning up in video stores or on television, they almost invariably show a recent copyright by Wade Williams. Why he has bought up these copyrights I am not sure but rumor had it that he had rereleased the 1950 R_o_c_k_e_t_s_h_i_p_X-M with new color footage he added and was planning to do the same with H_i_d_e_o_u_s_S_u_n_D_e_m_o_n. The 1988

World

Science Fiction Convention featured the world premiere of M_i_d_n_i_g_h_t

M_o_v_i_e

M_a_s_s_a_c_r_e, a film produced by Williams.

Blech!

To understand why this film is so bad you need to know a little of how it came to be made. Wade Williams tried to make a sendup of the old television show S_p_a_c_e_P_a_t_r_o_l. When the film was half made, the product was clearly so incompetent that the film would never have been released. Under any circumstances. Never. So here Williams was with only half a film that had two expensive stars and if he finished it, it would be thrown out. The stars? Well, he got Ann Robinson from W_a_r_o_f_t_h_e W_o_r_l_d_s and Robert Clarke, who finished up a good career by being in a number of cheap, bad science fiction films (though perhaps none so cheap and bad as the first half of S_p_a_c_e_P_a_t_r_o_l). It was Williams' bright idea to take his film and dress it up as an i_m_i_t_a_t_i_o_n dead teenager film. Dead teenager films make money. There are millions of teenagers willing to shell out big bucks to see fantasies of others in their age group being carved up like so much poultry. (Think about that if you're waiting for the next generation to come to power and improve things.) How do you make half of S_p_a_c_e_P_a_t_r_o_l into a dead teenager film? Well, it is a movie that a bunch of teenagers are watching when an alien comes along and starts knocking them off. So Williams can go back and forth between storylines as he shows a movie within a movie, or more accurately, a stupid waste of time within a stupid waste of time.

The outer film is a satire on 1950s science fiction films, the only films Williams seems to really know well, as well as being a dead teenager film. So the whole outer story is set in 1956. This improves the film within since it suddenly becomes very prophetic as well as pathetic. It predicts 1980s hairstyles for women. When it shows the earth from space, it shows light wispy clouds that were never shown in

science fiction films until years later. Then there is the fact that in the Midwest in 1956 (read that virtually none) had midnight shows.

Now, don't get me wrong. I do not mean to imply that the dead teenager portion of the film has much in the way of dead teenagers. Instead, it is taken up mostly by showing everything happening in the audience. I won't tell all, but while S_p_a_c_e_P_a_t_r_o_l is stupid and dull, the rest of the film can be better described as stupid, dull, and e_x_t_r_e_m_e_l_y tasteless.

Treat yourself right. Skip this film. This is a -3 film on the -4 to +4 scale.

Presentations on Current Films
(seen at Nolacon II)
Film comments by Mark R. Leeper
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One of the long-standing traditions of worldcons is the presentation of upcoming film and television releases. The tradition started with the 1976 Kansas City Worldcon (MidAmericon). There one filmmaker, a George Lucas famous for having made a successful rock-and-roll film, brought a low-budget science fiction film he was working on. It was a genuine mess. Some of us took the representative aside and told him what we'd really like to see. Luckily it was not too late for them to incorporate our suggestions and the result was a heck of a good film.

If you believe that one....

In any case, I cannot remember a worldcon in the last twelve years that has such a set of losers coming up. I have a positive expectation for only two of dozens of films coming up. Best looking is _ A_ l_ i_ e_ n
_ N_ a_ t_ i_ o_ n. The trailers have already started showing for this one in the theaters. The idea is that some time in the not-too-distant future aliens arrive in large numbers and set up their own ghettos in Los Angeles (right on the outskirts of Toontown?). They look human except where you and I have hair on our heads, their heads look like brown

watermelons. Hey, don't laugh. There are people in my family who look like that!

Anyhow, the aliens become a protected minority affirmative action group presumably because they have a long history of being persecuted and discriminated against unlike, say, the Jews. James Caan plays a Los Angeles cop. His partner is played by Mandy Patinkin, who usually plays a Jew but in this film he plays either one of the aliens or a Jew disguised as one of the aliens so that some Jew finally gets some benefit from affirmative action.

 A_ l_ i_ e_ n_ N_ a_ t_ i_ o_ n (formerly O_ u_ t_ e_ r_ H_ e_ a_ t but there were too many "Heat"

films already) has the look of an expensive film. The mystery aspects are reminiscent of S_ o_ y_ l_ e_ n_ t_ G_ r_ e_ e_ n, but the look of the film is crisper -- perhaps even like B_ l_ a_ d_ e_ r_ u_ n_ n_ e_ r. Of course, at this point any decent-looking film that is neither a sequel nor a remake is promising.

A little less promising is the new B_ a_ t_ m_ a_ n film. I will give you the bad news first. The studio has signed a big star for the title role. Now let's try a little experiment. Picture who you think would be a good Batman. Anybody picture Beetlejuice? How about the gum-chewing geek from N_ i_ g_ h_ t_ S_ h_ i_ f_ t? Nobody? I guess you just don't have what it takes to be a Hollywood executive. Yes, it's smash comedy star Michael Keaton who is going to play Bruce Wayne. But, I hear you ask,

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isn't he a little ... uh ... small to play Batman? Well, he has been working out and of course Batman was never that big anyway; he just wore a big suit with body armor. Yes, he did. Sure.

The studio showed some sketches of the Batmobile. The audience did not like it. The Batplane--some production sketches of it flying in the narrow space between buildings--the audience liked it much more. It reminded me a lot of a scene from a certain science fiction film from 1977. We will know for sure if Robin has to fly in the trench between buildings to drop missiles down a certain manhole. The look of the city is supposed to be a 1990s city as seen from the 1930s. Uh-huh. Anton Furst is doing the set design. He did C_ o_ m_ p_ a_ n_ y_ o_ f_ W_ o_ l_ v_ e_ s and is ready to move from wolves to bats. They will get an unknown to play Robin.

Presumably Eddie Murphy had enough sense to turn the role down. Jack Nicholson will play the Joker. I have heard a lot of people say nobody else would look right in the role. That is interesting, since the Joker was drawn to look like a character in a then well-known film. The Joker was based on Conrad Veidt, whose face was twisted in a rictus grin in _ T_ h_ e_ M_ a_ n_ W_ h_ o_ L_ a_ u_ g_ h_ s. So for good reason Veidt looked the part more than Nicholson. Of course that was long ago.

We are to be reassured, however, because the people putting together the film are genuine fans of the comic book. What they are not telling you is that they only really get a chance to read the comic books when they are done with their paper routes and when they aren't out trading baseball cards. I wonder if the people who make the "Care Bears" movies are genuine fans of the Care Bears. That might explain a lot.

And while we are on the subject of having a lot to explain, we saw a preview of the new _ W_ a_ r_ o_ f_ t_ h_ e_ W_ o_ r_ l_ d_ s television show. The premise is that somebody found a lot of never-produced scripts for the old _ I_ n_ v_ a_ d_ e_ r_ s television show and is recycling them. Oops, sorry. That's my premise. The idea is that the world really was nearly destroyed in 1953, just like George Pal showed us. The government bottled up a bunch of aliens--they're not really Martians--and now they have escaped. They should not be all that hard to round up but for three little things: 1) these guys are a lot more muscular and powerful than Pal let on, 2) they can inhabit dead bodies and make themselves look human, and 3) nobody remembers that most of the world was destroyed by aliens. I'm going to say that again because you probably think that was a typographical error. Nobody remembers that most of the world was destroyed by aliens. What do people think destroyed most of the major cities in 1953? Well, most people have not given the question a whole lot of thought. Don't knock it. The characters really look like people who might forget little details like an alien invasion. The first episode will feature war machines that look like and make noises like the ones in the film. Unfortunately the war machines all get destroyed, but we are left with a bunch of aliens walking around in human suits, just likes Wells might have written if he had thought of it. Yes.

What else is on the drawing boards? Take any popular film of the past five years and increment the suffix by one. C_o_c_o_o_n_I, for example, will have a C_o_c_o_o_n_I_I. R_o_b_o_c_o_p_I will have a R_o_b_o_c_o_p_I_I. Of course, he gets kicked off the force in it so the title is a misnomer, but who would go to see R_o_b_o_c_i_v_i_l_i_a_n? (There was a whole presentation on the making of the the original R_o_b_o_c_o_p that I will discuss later.) B_a_c_k_t_o_t_h_e_F_u_t_u_r_e I will give rise to B_a_c_k_t_o_t_h_e_F_u_t_u_r_e_I_I; N_i_g_h_t_m_a_r_e_o_n_E_l_m S_t_r_e_e_t_I_V will become N_i_g_h_t_m_a_r_e_o_n_E_l_m S_t_r_e_e_t_V. D_r_N_o_X_I_V: T_h_e_L_i_v_i_n_g_D_a_y_l_i_g_h_t_s will soon have a D_r_N_o_X_V. T_h_e_F_l_y I will have a T_h_e_F_l_y_I_I, in which Brundle Jr. follows in all six of his father's footsteps. I_n_d_i_a_n_a_J_o_n_e_s_I_I I (actually I_n_d_i_a_n_a_J_o_n_e_s_a_n_d_t_h_e_L_o_s_t_C_r_u_s_a_d_e) will feature an older Indiana Jones, contrary to the original plan, because Harrison Ford isn't getting any younger, also contrary to the original plan. Indy's papa will be played by Sean Connery (whom many of us will remember from D_a_r_b_y_O'G_i_l_l_a_n_d_t_h_e_L_i_t_t_l_e_P_e_o_p_l_e and similar films). A_l_i_e_n_s_I_I (or A_l_i_e_n_I_I) will have Sigourney Weaver in a coma as the Russkies play with the aliens to make new weapons, but Weaver will back in A_l_i_e_n_I_V in full force. There is no comment yet as to whether she will stick iwth the A_l_i_e_n series after that or will call it quits after I_V or will ride the series for three or four more entries. If her career sours enough, it is probably comforting for her to know that she will always be able to find work in the upcoming A_l_i_e_n sequel. (All these sequels to popular films will be a little late because the creative (?) geniuses were all on strike.)

C_h_i_l_d's_P_l_a_y, which may be a one-shot if it is not popular, is about a child's toy inhabited by the spirit of a dead gangster. The dark horse may well be L_i_v_i_n_g_o_n_t_h_e_E_d_g_e, which will either be great or will suck pond water. It is sort of an alternate universe L_e_a_v_e_I_t_t_o_B_e_a_v_e_r. Everything in this world is familiar but different. The family dog is about the ugliest thing the screen has ever seen, with three-inch fleas constantly chewing at him. All technology in the world seems connected in some way to using tubes to transport things. The feel is probably like that of T_e_r_r_o_r_V_i_s_i_o_n. Time will tell.

I also went to a presentation on the making of R_o_b_o_c_o_p. It was inspired by Stan Lee's neurotic superheroes in Marvel Comics. This was a very informative panel and told you how they did all those wonderful special effects that are such audience pleasers. The presentation included slides of the process used to film how they shot pieces off of the main character, fingers first, then hands, then whole arms ripped off. Good stuff like that, you know. well, for example, the way they shoot an arm off a character is by attaching a fake arm with Velcro and attaching a line from a rod and reel. Then a fisherman off-stage can just snap away the arm. How wonderful somebody figured that out! Then

for a touch of realism, there is the scene where a man falls into a vat of toxic waste and when he crawls out he is melting right on screen.

This was actually a reprise of an effect that some of the same people worked on for a nearly worthless film called T_h_e_I_n_c_r_e_d_i_b_l_e_M_e_l_t_i_n_g_M_a_n.

But the capper is when the melting man is hit by a truck and sort of splatters. To create the wonderful effect that was clearly needed they

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took the table scraps of the people working on the film and let them rot in an open garbage can for two weeks. It was these scraps that were used for the insides of the dummy that was hit by the car. Charming.

What the producers of the film objected to was that the Hollywood censors cut so much from the film. The first killing by the ED-209 in the film was supposed to really set the tone for the film as being humorous. We see the ED-209 gun a man down in a board room during a demo, but it is just left at that. In the original scene, the robot just pumped thousands of rounds of ammunition into the body and it just kept quivering. Test audiences laughed very hard at this comically overdone scene but the Hollywood censors cut it. Now, silly me, I thought there were no censors in Hollywood. I thought that the issue was not one of censorship against artistic freedom but rather one of artistic integrity versus money and the producers, not wanting to accept the decreased profits that go with an X-rated film, instead gave their audiences what they themselves call an inferior product in order to boost profits. And for having made this decision they want sympathy. On its own merits I give this film a positive rating, but well below what most people seem to have given it.

It seems strange to say I hate to see a particular sort of special effect used in science fiction but using gore effects in science fiction films changes plot stress from wonder to horror.

Well, that's the lineup, kiddies.

Nolacon II -- The First 46 Hours
Some observations by Mark R. Leeper
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[Well gang, I flubbed it. I started writing a con report for a convention I had high hopes for. Usually I like to write in glowing terms about what I like about a convention, mostly so I can remember it myself. Most of this report will seem like grouching. If that is your impression, trust it. This was not a fun convention to write about and I frankly lost the ambition part of the way through because so much was going wrong. I cover here most of the first two days and will leave it at that. The gripe session when the con was (nearly) over was one of the most animated and exciting I can remember. Apparently I was one of the biggest fans of Nolacon II. There was a lot of screaming and yelling from people who did not like the con as much as I did. The con committee gave lots of excuses -- some very creative. We may never hear their like again since Nolacon III will be a very snowy Labor Day weekend in New Orleans.]

September 1 [7:46 AM]: Well, we are off and crawling. This is the second day of the convention but in a very real sense we haven't even begun.

There are really two kinds of worldcons: the worldcon that got the bid based on where they are and the kind that got the bid based on what they are. A Boston worldcon is the latter sort. Nobody dreams of a wonderful vacation in Boston. I have never seen a poster for seeing wonderful Boston. Among all major cities that seem to get the worldcon, Boston is just about the least interesting city. But then you can generally count on a Noreascon to be superbly well-run. There probably isn't a whole lot to do in Boston that the con committee considers more fun than setting up the con. The con runs like a well-oiled machine.

It looks like Nolacon is also running like a well-oiled machine, but in this case it is a well-oiled piano. I have not seen a whole lot of how the con will run but so far everything has gone wrong. Registration was supposed to start at 4 PM yesterday. So far so good. And _ o _ n _ l _ y that far. Almost immediately there was an announcement that registration would start four hours late. So we waited four hours. And we were among the first in line when registration failed to start at 8 PM. It was in a holding pattern, we were told. Well, the heck with this. We (that's Evelyn, Kate, and me) went out on the streets to pass the time while registration got its act together. We came back an hour and a half later--maybe a couple of hours--and things apparently had started to happen. We registered and started looking for a schedule so we could plan our time. Usually that is the first thing we do at a con. I would say always that is the first thing we do at a con, but this one is a notable exception. The reason is that at this convention there are no schedules. Printer problems apparently delayed the availability of

schedules. I told someone that I wanted to find out if there would be any programming that day and got sent to the trouble desk. Apparently someone wanting to know if there is programming going on falls in the category of "trouble." I asked there if there would be any programming that night and all they could say was that they doubted it. They were not sure one way or the other.

[9:46 AM]: Well, we got up and went for breakfast at Mother's, a

local restaurant that is cheap and has local delicacies like debris, which is sort of a chipped pot roast. I had debris and biscuits complete with Louisiana hot sauce. Not a big meal, but tasty. By the time we finished it was after nine, the time the promised schedules were to arrive. We went straight to the Marriott. The 9-AM-promised schedules will be available by 10 AM. I will believe that when I see them. Maybe I am just being cynical. I doubt that Nolacon has what it takes to get their timetables out only eighteen hours late. We are now back in the room and everybody is busy getting on each other's nerves and writing their logs.

Things may not be quite as bad as I have painted them. There is a posted schedule that is readable if you get down on your knees in front of the board it is posted on. I was able to see what is on the film program. Some of the choices are pretty good. I hope to finally get to see J u s t I m a g i n e. There are a few others I wouldn't mind seeing.

[11:21 AM]: Well, we got over to the Marriott to pick up our pocket programs about 10:30... just in time to miss them. One hundred pocket programs were distributed to the one hundred lucky prizewinners who got the first portable listings of what activities would be at the Worldcon. The remaining people ended up waiting in a long line to get the programs when they finally appeared in some numbers. The wait was about ten to fifteen more minutes. And they were actually less than 19 hours late! Maybe there really will be a Worldcon here after all.

The program is cheaply printed on newsprint with ink that comes off on your hands (which admittedly makes it even more portable, at least part of it!). The pocket program comprises the middle eight pages that you can rip out and stuff in a pocket. The four of us (Evelyn, Kate, Dave, and I) sat on the floor reading the program. This con report will tell you much of what I found there.

At 11:30 we went to the opening ceremonies. They were only about five minutes late in starting. Two unidentified con-goers had to be taken out on stretchers, overcome by the shock of having a Nolacon event that was less than an hour late. The ceremony started with a jazz band marching up the aisle in the best traditions of the New Orleans jazz funeral. They also threw handfuls after handfuls of convention doubloons.

An aside is required here. One of the peculiarly New Orleans-ish traditions is that during parades you throw doubloons at the crowd. Not

real doubloons, of course. Aluminum coins with the name of the event and some sort of emblem on it. When I was growing up they used to sell the same sort of coins with pictures of all the presidents of the United States and states of the union. Apparently, New Orleans has taken the custom of making cheap aluminum coins and adopted it as part of the local culture. The festivities seemed to be mostly giving a long introduction to who Pro Guest of Honor Donald Wollheim is. Wollheim got up and said he would make his Guest of Honor speech later, then sat down again. Then some state senator gave Wollheim the key to the city of New Orleans. This is the special key that together with \$1.50 will buy you a cup of coffee most places in the city. I seriously doubt that more than five residents who were not part of the Con even knew that Wollheim had been given a key to the city. And I doubt that all five cared. About the best thing about the opening ceremonies was the fact that they were short. It went to about noon. That was the time the hucksters' room was opening up.

We rushed to the hucksters' room. Actually we got to the hucksters' room at about five minutes to noon and found much to our surprise that it had actually opened early. It may well have been the first really bright thing anyone at this convention has done. Those people who have been to both the opening of the hucksters' room of a worldcon and to the Oklahoma Land Rush have attested to the very similar natures of the two events. Those people with a dissenting opinion have cited the fact that the Oklahoma Land Rush took place in large part on horseback and horses try not to trample each other.

[9:27 AM]: As hucksters' rooms go, this one is somewhat pallid. I am not sure what that means, but there did not seem to be a whole lot of interest value. I guess the days of the 15-cent used book are long gone. The book hucksters have been partially pulled out by hucksters of pseudo-art, of weapons, of games, of tarot cards, etc. I wandered around and found a total of one book of interest, a new novel by Colin Wilson, but it was certainly packaged to look like garbage. Generally Wilson writes science fiction that is heavy on both action and philosophy, an odd combination. The packaging certainly stressed the action aspect.

I decided for a different sort of souvenir I would try to sneak up on people I knew and get candid snapshots of them looking at goods. To a large extent I was able to do this.

I ran into Leo looking at pulp magazines trying to decide if it was worth \$250 to get _ A_ s_ t_ o_ u_ n_ d_ i_ n_ g #1. He apparently has a nearly complete collection of _ A_ s_ t_ o_ u_ n_ d_ i_ n_ g (now called _ A_ n_ a_ l_ o_ g) and is trying to decide if it is worth what it would cost to complete the collection.

That done, I decided it might be worth my while to see what the B. Dalton had. leaving the hotel I ran into Kendall. He is a park ranger

without a park. Apparently much of New Orleans has been designated a non-publicly-owned park. Kendall gives tours through the French Quarter

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for the National Park Service; we took one such tour last Sunday. Kendall mentioned that he'd be dropping over to the convention. This is apparently one of his first conventions. After talking with him I went to the B. Dalton and saw what they had, but didn't get anything. From there it was back to the room to drop off my one book. As I was leaving Evelyn and Kate were coming in with some Wendy's burgers and chili. I didn't want to take their lunch, a decision they probably agreed on, so I went down to Popeye's to get some chicken.

Popeye's is a chain that started in the South. We consider it the best of the fried chicken chains in New York City. There you have a choice of regular or spicy chicken and, of course, I like the spicy. But here they apparently have only one kind. I got it and was pleased to find out it was the spicy. Apparently the choice in New York is because they figure New Yorkers as wimps.

The restaurant was pretty full and I asked to sit at a half-occupied table. There were con-goers at my table and at a table next to me. A woman at the table next to me said she was happy to meet me; she likes my writing. It turns out she belongs to the New England Science Fiction Society, with whom our AT&T science fiction club exchanges notices. We talked for a while about Joe Ross. Joe is the founder of my college science fiction society who went on to be a lawyer and is currently working on the Dukakis campaign. Joe's current joke is that he knew Dukakis before Dukakis was Greek.

After that it was getting toward 2 PM and time for our first panel, "Ghosts Along the Mississippi." There were supposed to be five people on the panel but only three showed up: Karl Wagner, Glen Cook, and Pat Adkins. Pat smoked a big cigar. It stunk and so did the discussion. Only Pat was prepared to talk on the subject; the other two made excuses that they had only been told at the last minute they would be on the panel. They knew nothing about the subject. While it is true that it was probably not their fault, it is one more example of a very poorly run convention. I am not sure why they agreed to get in front of an audience and give a poor excuse instead of a discussion and, worse still, they should never have been asked to do so on too short notice to

prepare. The discussion that was supposed to be from 2 to 3 PM went from 2:10 to about 2:35.

The next panel was "My 10 Favorite SF Films," to be led by Joey Grillo, the film chairman of the con. In fact, he was the only person to be speaking. When he still didn't show up at 5 after, I suggested to Dave Bara that the two of us lead the discussion instead. By 10 after Dave agreed. We had people pull their chairs into a circle and actually had a fairly spirited discussion. At about 3:35 Grillo showed up, explaining that he'd lost the piece of paper that told him what time the discussion was. He spent a few minutes, talking mostly about what a good film program he'd pulled together and after about ten minutes left early, allowing his panel to proceed without him. I may be biased, but the discussion seemed much better when he wasn't around. The next

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presentation was by S t a r l o g magazine and was a slide presentation on upcoming films. This is always well-attended, so of course it was in a small side meeting room. In a room that had space for about 100 people there were packed about 200 people and more people overflowing into the hallway. Meanwhile in the ballroom next door there were about 60 people listening to some other presentation. The natural thing to do was switch rooms since the Con Committee had clearly misjudged each presentation.

The suggestion to trade rooms was not met with general agreement, though. There were a bunch of people (in each room) complaining they had good seats and did not want to give them up. Eventually the room exchange was mandated and took place without much of a hitch. I ended up near the back of the room. This might have made it hard to see the screen, but I never come to science fiction conventions without my folding field glasses. I got them for more serious travel, but there is nothing like them for effectively improving your seating at a science fiction convention.

At these presentations I used to learn interesting things about upcoming films and would come out with a list of ones I wanted to see. That experience is becoming more and more a memory. Too many of the films are turning out to be so-called sequels that are really just cheap remakes. F r i g h t N i g h t was an okay film, in some ways a pleasant surprise, about a boy who discovered that his new neighbor was a

vampire. In Fright Night I the vampire's sister moves in next door. Why, what an intriguing concept for a film! What made the first film interesting was the characters coming to grips with the idea that vampires really exists. They can't repeat that; they can only make a tiresome extension of the first film. It is hard to get very excited about a new Halloween film, a new Nightmareon ElmStreet film, even a new Indiana Jones film. Batman could be done decently if it is stylish enough, but they are not off to a very good start casting Michael Keaton as Batman. Then there are two more Hellraiser films in the works. Clive Barker is an interesting writer who totally failed to make an interesting story with the first Hellraiser film. It had a spare plot that he used as a hanger for all the gross-out effects he could think of. The essence of horror is in subtlety. The normal world around you hides unseen forces that are really terrifying. That is how Barker's stories work. Hellraiser is more like a Roadrunner cartoon except that everybody in it gets lambasted again and again in the bloodiest, nastiest ways. Who needs two more films like that?

Well, from there it was back to the room to write and talk. After an hour Pete Rubinstein, an old friend, showed up as arranged and we went out for dinner. We found a Cajun seafood place with portions that were entirely too big. I generally try to clear my plate and it was impossible. Had the deal been "all you can eat" I would not have eaten as much. I got a fried seafood platter that included crawfish, crab claws, frogs' legs, and who knows what else.

>From there it was back to the room for talk, writing, and early bed.

One incident I didn't mention since I am not sure when exactly it was yesterday, so I might as well put it in here: Our convention's time overlaps with a Southern Baptist convention. Our hotel has been really packed with Southern Baptists who are apparently all black. I got into the elevator with three women and a tall man who are apparently here for the Baptist convention. The women were asking first about my colorful nametag and then about the science fiction convention. I told them the sort of things that are done. As they were getting off the elevator the man commented that science fiction conventions are a good thing "because

you never can tell."

Earlier I was in an elevator with someone who was saying that it might be a problem having the two conventions in the same hotel at the same time. He said that never works out. I think he must have been a newcomer. I told him the Baptists have been in the hotel all week and you will never find a more friendly, considerate, and instantly likable group of people. There are unfortunately at any convention a certain percentage of people who are just there to have a good time and who don't care if it is at others' expense. With the Southern Baptists that percentage seems to be zero to three decimal places. I guess they are here because they firmly believe in their religion and it would make no sense to blow it by being inconsiderate in any way. If you are going to have to share convention space with another convention, these would be the people I would choose.

9/2 [9:30 AM]: Well, it took a while for people to get up. We went to a breakfast place Ev chose (we here means Evelyn, Kate and I; Dave is a late riser). Service was a little slow and the food was just okay.

[12:02 PM]: The first panel of the morning was the long and short of science fiction of the previous year. Present were Charles Brown, Amy Thomson, Ed Bryant, and Peter Heck. Eventually Gardner Dozois showed up. Among the salient points was a discussion of shared-world anthologies which none of the panelists thought were particularly good. The major problem is that the world does not become developed sufficiently in a multiple-author universe. Too much effort is spent on consistency and not enough on expanding the world. There was some discussion on whether shared-world anthologies were on the way in or out. The answer appears to be that they are going to be around for at least another couple of years. They may be losing popularity as Charles Brown suggested, but it will take at least two years for the publishing industry to react to the drop. There was some discussion about the proper length for a science fiction story. Monetary realities have pushed the length of science fiction novels up. Brown suggested that T_h_e_F_o_r_g_e_o_f_G_o_d and T_h_e_U_p_l_i_f_t W_a_r are really much longer than their plots require. Dozois thinks that the short story is really a good length for science fiction story-telling because it is sufficient length

to present the idea without getting too bogged down in verbiage. On the other hand, it was suggested that novels are really the best length for fantasy because you want the world to be fully described and one in which you would have some interest in living. That cannot be done well in too short a piece. Novel length is really required.

Following that was a quick trip through the hucksters' room and the first half of the art show.

A year or so ago I wrote a humorous piece on pizza as being Nature's perfect food and why. The piece was printed in L_a_n'_s_L_a_n_t_e_r_n. In the art show was a humorous diagram on pizza being Nature's perfect food with humorous comments throughout saying much the same thing I was saying in greater detail.

Next I went to a presentation on the making of R_o_b_o_c_o_p. This is described in a separate article.

9/4 [4:42 PM]: I am clearly doing too much doing and not enough writing but I am now about 48 hours behind. My next panel was on science fiction on radio. I was expecting that it would be about science fiction in the Golden Age of radio. I expected it would be about programs like D_i_m_e_n_s_i_o_n_X and its later incarnation X_M_i_n_u_s_O_n_e.

As it turns out, it was about contemporary audio science fiction for radio and recording media. The speaker, whose name I have forgotten, though it was familiar at the time, is the creator of James Scott. WBAI radio in New York occasionally runs the James Scott adventure. They are a sort of James Bond in space. My impression is that they might have been decent but that his characters had too many unconvincing-sounding accents. If they run them again I may listen more carefully. The speaker talked about why he thought dramatization is so much more compelling than the sort of narration that is currently showing up in books on cassette. And he talked about how he got started as a kid making science fiction tapes. It was a lot of work in those days and even as recently as he did the James Scott tapes, because timing out the sound effects is so difficult. He would spend three to five hours creating a 45-second segment of drama with all the associated special effects. Now with sampling machines he can do it a lot easier. He can record the sound of a door closing and then he has a whole keyboard for playing it back. For a tiny door he plays a high key. He talked about how he recorded the sound of a toilet flushing, sampled it playing it backwards, and then played it at various pitches. I asked him if he couldn't have recorded the sound going forward and reversed it in the synthesizer. He responded that he had been new to the machine and the guy whom he rented it from could have told him the synthesizer had that capability just as I had done, but had not. The interesting thing is that I had no reason to know the synthesizer had reversal either, but it must store the sound digitally and if it does that, technically it should be very easy to reverse sounds. The same guy's latest project is to record dramatizations of R_o_b_o_t_C_i_t_y for Caedmon Records.

The next panel I went to was on archaeology of the future. The panel consisted of four archaeologists and one writer talking about what archaeology really is, how it is changing with time, and what the future will be able to tell about us. They talked about how inexact archaeology really is. Several liked an old book that came out called M_o_t_e_l_o_f_t_h_e_M_y_s_t_e_r_i_e_s that tells how future archaeologists who use the same techniques as the present ones would interpret what they found when they dug up a modern-day motel.

[Well, gang. I guess that was all I really felt like writing about. Do you really w_a_n_t to read about Japanese films shown without benefit of dubbing or subtitles? Do you want to hear about films that did not arrive? I thought not.]

[Another post script: I have been asked by people about what I thought of the hotel. I stayed at the Sheraton and did not personally have much in the way of trouble. The elevator problems were no worse than one might expect. I only heard about problems of not being able to get rooms. At the end of a 10-day stay I discovered they undercharged me to the tune of \$150. I called the desk, telling them that this was a switch, I was telling them I was being undercharged. The man told me that it w_a_s a switch, but that I should go with the lower rate. I kept the money, but as I usually do in these cases I will contribute the proceeds to Oxford Famine Relief (a.k.a. OXFAM). I had already been a regular contributor when I saw the PBS program on "The Politics of Hunger" which as an unbiased source had some very good things to say about OXFAM.]

