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                Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
                Club Notice - 2/17/89 -- Vol. 7, No. 34

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are on Wednesdays at noon.
   LZ meetings are in LZ 2R-158. MT meetings are in the cafeteria.

  _D_A_T_E   _T_O_P_I_C

02/22 LZ: SPHERE by Michael Crichton
03/08 MT: Space Colonies in Fact and Fiction (follow-up)
03/15 LZ: THE FINAL REFLECTION by John Ford (STAR TREK Novels)
04/05 LZ: The "Giants" Trilogy by James Hogan (Characterization in Hard SF)
04/12 MT: "Decorative Horror" and Clark Ashton Smith
04/26 LZ: MIRRORSHADES edited by Bruce Sterling (Anthologies)
05/10 MT: European Science Fiction (especially Stanislaw Lem)
05/17 LZ: LATHE OF HEAVEN by Ursula K. Leguin (The Nature of Reality)
06/07 LZ: ON STRANGER TIDES by Tim Powers (Swashbuckling SF)

  _D_A_T_E   _E_X_T_E_R_N_A_L_ _M_E_E_T_I_N_G_S/_C_O_N_V_E_N_T_I_O_N_S/_E_T_C.

02/18 NJSFS New Jersey Science Fiction Society: Toni Taylor (artist)
           (phone 201-432-5965 for details)
03/04 APRICON X. NYC. GoH: Robert Sheckley; Info: Barnard-Columbia SFS,
 -03/05   313 Ferris-Booth Hall, Columbia Univ., NYC 10027. (212) 663-2240.
03/10 LUNACON. Tarrytown NY. GoH: Roger Zelazny; AGoH: Ron Walotsky;
 -03/12   EGoh: David Hartwell; FGoH: David Kyle. Info: Lunacon, Box 338,
           New York NY 10150; (609) 261-8316.
03/11? Science Fiction Association of Bergen County: TBA
           (phone 201-933-2724 for details) (Saturday)
05/05 CONTRAPTION. MI. GoH: Mike Resnick; FGoHs: Mark & Evelyn Leeper.
 -05/07   Info: Diana Harlan Stein, 1325 Key West, Troy MI 48083.
08/31 NOREASCON III (47th World SF Con). MA. GoHs: Andre Norton, Ian & Betty
 -09/04   Ballantine; FGoH: The Stranger Club. Info: Noreascon Three,
           Box 46, MIT Branch P.O., Cambridge, MA 02139.

HO Chair: John Jetzt   HO 1E-525   834-1563 mtuxo!jetzt

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LZ Chair:     Rob Mitchell   LZ 1B-306   576-6106   mtuxo!jrrt
MT Chair:     Mark Leeper    MT 3E-433   957-5619   mtgzz!leeper
HO Librarian: Tim Schroeder  HO 3M-420   949-5866   homxb!tps
LZ Librarian: Lance Larsen   LZ 3L-312   576-6142   lzfme!lfl
MT Librarian: Will Harmon    MT 3C-406   957-5128   mtgzz!wch
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Factotum:     Evelyn Leeper  MT 1F-329   957-2070   mtgzy!ecl
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1. Charlie Harris chose Michael Crichton's _S_p_h_e_r_e the Lincroft
discussion book for this Wednesday. However, Charlie's been busy
polishing his stand-up comedy act, hoping for his big break at The
Bottom Line. For example, he claimed that the Cinema Club got the
United States Postal Service to advertise _A_t_t_a_c_k _o_f _t_h_e _K_i_l_l_e_r
_T_o_m_a_t_o_e_s by issuing a stamp featuring tomatoes right before the
showing. Of course, the stamp was of a New Jersey farmer during
the Revolution harvesting tomatoes, and that was fifty years before
tomatoes were shown to be edible. (You always knew New Jersey was
ahead of everyone else, right?) Those who wish to catch Charlie
before he becomes the new Eddie Murphy should attend the Holmdel
Cinema Club showings (memberships are always available at the door)
and after Charlie's monologue, you get a bonus--a movie! This is
all by way of saying that Charlie has been very busy and has not
actually told me what the book is about, so I can't tell you. [-
ecl]

2. We have had a number of odd themes for double features, but
perhaps none so strange as for our double feature for 7 PM,
Thursday, February 23. Our theme is going to be fun-loving looks
at...Adolf Hitler.

Sing Hitlers, Dancing Hitlers
THE GREAT DICTATOR (1940) dir. by Charlie Chaplin
THE PRODUCERS (1968) dir. by Mel Brooks

While Hitler was still a very real threat, Chaplin recognized the
physical resemblance between the Fuhrer and Chaplin's little tramp.
He made THE GREAT DICTATOR, his first fully sound film. He plays a
dual role ad an innocent Jewish barber and as the nefarious
dictator Adenoid Hynkle. Jack Oakie plays another dictator,

Benzino Napaloni. (The film _w_a_s shown to Adolf Hitler, incidentally. He sat through it once and when it was over he quietly asked for it to be run a second time. When it was over a second time he quietly got up, walked out, and never mentioned the film again.) For people who arrive on time we will (try to) have reprints of the original souvenir program book sold at the theater.

Our second feature was never actually seen by Adolf Hitler. Hitler is the subject of a play with a play when a disreputable Broadway producer.... Oh, heck, you know what THE PRODUCERS is about. It must be Mel Brooks' best-known film.

These are two films that Leonard Maltin give 3-1/2 stars each.

3. I misspoke myself regarding the influence _T_h_e _S_h_o_c_k_w_a_v_e _R_i_d_e_r had on one of our members. As he puts it:

Re my comments on THE SHOCKWAVE RIDER, I believe you

misquoted me, somewhat to my disadvantage, in Mt. Void. I was a programmer long before the book was published. What the book did give me was my interest in computer security, which I had previously thought was as interesting as numerical analysis, and carefully avoided in grad school. [-Arthur Kaletzky]

What can I say? Mea culpa! [-ecl]

4. So here's the scoop. One of our most popular film festival double features ever was an animation festival. I was all set to have another animation festival, something of a coup. I was going to show _L_i_g_h_t _Y_e_a_r_s and _W_i_z_a_r_d_s. I obtained both. When I actually announce the festival I will tell you about _L_i_g_h_t _Y_e_a_r_s, but let me tell you something about _W_i_z_a_r_d_s. Ralph Bakshi made it as sort of a dress rehearsal for his big project, _L_o_r_d _o_f _t_h_e _R_i_n_g_s. I saw it when it came out in 1977 and thought that it was not very good and that its "message" was hypocritical and puerile. Yet over the years I have been asked repeatedly by various people if the film was available. When I saw an opportunity to obtain it for a film festival, I went for it. So many people wanted to see it, I

figured it would be a service to make it available.

Only one fly in the ointment.... I watched it. In early 1977
_W_i_z_a_r_d_s must not have had a whole lot of competition as an animated
film. Or maybe I have become less tolerant. But _W_i_z_a_r_d_s is _j_u_s_t
_a_w_f_u_l! It is stupid and hypocritical and boring and dull. Some of
its stereotypes are offensive. The animation is bad and often
sloppy. I could go on and on.

Now, ever mindful to give my audience what it wants (within reason)
I am willing to show this odious film is 1) people want to see it
and 2) it is understood I do not endorse this film.   Otherwise I
will replace it with _A_l_l_e_g_r_o _n_o_n _T_r_o_p_p_o or _P_l_a_g_u_e _D_o_g_s or some
such. Let me know if you have a preference.

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

     "God does not play dice with the universe." --Alfred Einstein

     "Not only does God play dice with the universe, but sometimes
     He throws them where they cannot be seen." --Stephen Hawking

              THE RAINBOW CADENZA by J. Neil Schulman
            Avon, 1986 (c1983), ISBN 0-380-75123-2, $3.50
               A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
               Copyright 1989 Evelyn C. Leeper

     _T_h_e _R_a_i_n_b_o_w _C_a_d_e_n_z_a won the Prometheus Award in 1984 for best
libertarian science fiction of the year. That may be so, but considered
just as science fiction, it doesn't succeed as well. The premise is

that much of humanity lives in various space habitats. Those who remain on Earth have eliminated war by drafting all women into government brothels. Schulman has some speechifying by characters to explain why this works--it's not very convincing. Certainly the question of why the habitats which don't have this rule aren't constantly at war is never addressed. In case you can't figure out what the book is trying to say, Schulman provides sixty pages of afterword of his and other people's comments about the book and the Libertarian philosophy.

This would all be marginally acceptable were it not for the amount of explicit sex Schulman puts in _T_h_e _R_a_i_n_b_o_w _C_a_d_e_n_z_a. (Brief pause here while half my readers run out to buy the book. :-)) Were the sex being described the sex in the brothels at least Schulman could claim it was to portray the inhumanity of such a draft. But it is the sex during the hunts of the Touchables or other occasions that is being described and so Schulman appears to be pandering to his readership to boost his sales through titillation rather than to remain faithful to his story.

I will admit that if I had a better knowledge of music and musical theory this book might have been more interesting or enjoyable, since much of it deals with the characters' writing of "musical" pieces using lights (as in a laser light show) rather than sounds. However, since I _d_o_n'_t have this musical expertise, that part did nothing for me either.

It may be that libertarian proselytizing does not make good science fiction. (Certainly the film about space habitats shown at a recent World Science Fiction Convention produced by the Libertarian Party was extremely dull and preachy.) But then it takes a great author--on the level of Swift or Orwell perhaps--to write a novel that entertains and preaches at the same time.

THE FLY II
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
Copyright 1989 Mark R. Leeper

	Capsule review: Bleak sequel to David Cronenberg's
bleak remake of _T_h_e _F_l_y. A few good ideas mixed in with
a lot of absurdity. Aimed very much at a teenage market.
Rating: -1.

	In 1958 Twentieth Century Fox released _T_h_e _F_l_y, based on the story
of the same name that had appeared the year before in _P_l_a_y_b_o_y. As they
would later do with _S_t_a_r _W_a_r_s, they assumed that _T_h_e _F_l_y would be a
quick summer film for the kids and would soon be forgotten. Instead it
was their top moneymaker of the year. Later they made the first of two
sequels, _R_e_t_u_r_n _o_f _t_h_e _F_l_y, about the son of the tragic hero of the
first film also being transformed. Three years ago Mel Brooks'
Brooksfilm production company and Fox made a non-remake remake of _T_h_e
_F_l_y, directed by David Cronenberg. It was successful so with the
inevitability of history repeating itself, Brooksfilm and Fox have made
a sequel about a son following in all six of his father's footsteps.
Since _R_e_t_u_r_n _o_f _t_h_e _F_l_y was already used and _P_u_p_a _o_f _t_h_e _F_l_y is hard to
say, they have called it _T_h_e _F_l_y _I_I.

	Technically this is not a teenage sequel since Martin Brundle
(played by Eric Stoltz wearing more makeup than he did in _M_a_s_k) grows up
very quickly and only looks, sounds, and acts like a teenager. He is
really only five years old, but a _v_e_r_y _m_a_t_u_r_e five years old. In fact,
he is not only mature enough to have a sophisticated adult relationship,
including sex, with a woman who cannot tell she is making love to a
five-year-old (Beth Logan, played by Daphne Zuniga), little Brundle has
also become a computer hacker and genetic scientist par excellence.
This prodigious brilliance is apparently the result of a skillful
blending of the genes of a brilliant scientist, a science magazine
writer, and a horsefly. He also seems to have inherited a love of dogs
from his insect parentage. (Dogs are very nice to flies and often make
them dinner.) Now suddenly, after five years of at least looking
normal, Martin is being taken over by the fly genes he inherited. Of
course, his genes seem to be all he was allowed to inherit as he is
unknowingly kept prisoner by Bartok Industries, which in Martin's
father's day seemed to have a very nice "hands off" policy on their
workers' efforts, but which in the intervening five years has become
Cruelty, Incorporated, performing vicious experiments on animals and
ignoring the human rights of their employees. Yes, we have a genuine
teenage sequel with sensitive, smart teens (one of whom is only five
years old) and nasty, stupid, vicious adults.

	Like _T_h_e _F_l_y _I, _T_h_e _F_l_y _I_I is a somber dark film, literally and
figuratively. Like _T_h_e _F_l_y _I, it has one or two ideas mixed in with
liberal doses of balderdash. You can also see more of anything that

went over big in the first film. There are lots of gore effects.
Little Fly seems to have his father's habit of shattering his way
straight through panes of glass. And in the grand tradition of sequels,
the main continuing character was one of the least interesting
characters in the original. In this case it is Stethis, the publisher,
played by John Getz. Admittedly we do get flashes of Martin's two human
parents. (The actor who played the fly parent tragically died before
the sequel was made, if I know my entomology.) A Gina-Davis-non-
lookalike we see scream on an operating table and die. We do actually
see a tape of Jeff Goldblum as Seth Brundle, claiming he designed the
transporter/reconstructor to be "creative" in the way it rebuilds
things. "Creative." That was the word he used. Right! Oh, and there
is an in-joke. One of the characters is reading _ T_ h_ e _ S_ h_ a_ p_ e _ o_ f _ R_ a_ g_ e, a
study of the films of David Cronenberg, the director of _ T_ h_ e _ F_ l_ y _ I.

    This is one of those films you can tell is in trouble just by
reading the credits. Four people worked on the script--always a bad
sign, and even worse since two have the same last name. Then there is
the fact that the special effects were created and designed by Chris
Walas, Inc. Why does that sound bad? Because the film was directed by
Chris Walas, that's why.

    The science of _ T_ h_ e _ F_ l_ y _ I_ I could have been interesting, combining
aspects of modern genetics and computer science. The plot involves both
gene splicing and the first reference I have seen on the screen to
computer worms. But the science is bad and uses dramatic license rather
than any knowledge of the field. The science is tailored to the plot
and the special effects rather than the reverse. The creature that
Martin mutates into has little to do with a human or a fly. And then
the idea that the fly genes would save all their disfiguring effects
until Martin is grown up seems absurd, and the idea that the fly DNA and
the human DNA would combine for a viable (living) creature is a little
hard to believe.

    All told, this is a disappointing sequel to Cronenberg's _ T_ h_ e _ F_ l_ y.
Rate it a -1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

Boskone 26
              Con report by Evelyn C. Leeper
              Copyright 1989 Evelyn C. Leeper

    Again Boskone ran from late Friday afternoon through late Sunday
afternoon (with Punday Sunday evening, making it very sparsely
attended). Since I was scheduled to appear on a Friday 7 PM panel, we
left work about 2 PM and headed up to Springfield. Other than a
fifteen-minute blizzard west of Hartford and perfectly wretched traffic
in Hartford (we hit it just about 5 PM), we had little trouble, but
those were enough to make it hectic. We arrived at Springfield about
6:20, parked the car, and then discovered I had left my sheet telling
where the Green Room was in New Jersey. Mark suggested going direct to
the panel, since I had that written in my appointment book, but I
decided to go to regular registration first to find the Green Room and
then to the Green Room. Registration was in the Sheraton Tara; the
Green Room was in the Marriott. Because of the construction being done
on the Marriott's lobby, there was a circuitous route required to get
from one hotel to the other which took ten minutes each time. This led
to a lot of difficulties in getting between programming items later.
Although this was billing as being a completely indoor path, it included
a stretch through an unheated, open-sided parking garage--not my idea of
the Great Indoors.

    Upon arriving at the Green Room, I discovered they had moved the
panel, so it's a good thing I didn't go directly to the room I had
listed. I spent about fifteen minutes unwinding and talking to Saul

Jaffe and Laurie Mann, then proceeded to my panel (which will be described in the panel section).

Hotels

The hotel was spread between two hotels, the Marriott and the Sheraton Tara. The two are across the street from each other, but because of the renovations, this path was unusable. The only route (mentioned earlier) took ten minutes and made access for the handicapped a real problem. Each hotel again had a snack bar set up near the programming areas, with quite reasonable prices, and lots of seating space for discussions and just plain resting.

We, of course, stayed with our friend in nearby South Hadley and thereby did not exacerbate the already overflowing hotel problem. While NESFA could handle a Boskone of up to 1800, the hotel situation is such that realistically not more than about 1400 could be accommodated.

Dealers' Rooms

Just as last year, there was dealers' rooms in each hotel. So, yes, there was always a dealers' room nearby, but it was difficult (even more than last year) to get to the "other" room. The Marriott was the

Boskone 26   Feburary 12, 1989   Page 2

primary programming hotel, so I wonder if the dealers in the Tara felt short-changed. On the other hand, the Art Show was in the Tara, so most people got there at least once. The problem is there just isn't a room large enough to hold all the dealers that isn't already allocated.

The dealers' rooms dealt mostly in books, and a very good assortment it was. Again, sales were not up to what dealers had hoped for--it's not clear why.

Art Show

I got to the Art Show only briefly, and was not greatly thrilled by it. Maybe I'm losing my interest in them or something, but they seem to have turned into a combination of bad art for sale and good art marked NFS ("Not For Sale"). For an art exhibit, the conditions are less than ideal for viewing the pieces. They did have a very large track of

artists' programming, which I had suggested last year, so maybe they
actually read these reports!

Film Program

The film program consisted of several George Pal films, but through
some mixup they got the television film _ T_ h_ e _ T_ i_ m_ e _ M_ a_ c_ h_ i_ n_ e rather than
the
Pal version. Blecchh! I didn't see any of them. Some people
complained about the scant film program--given what they choose, I would
be just as happy if they didn't have any. I had suggested last year
they get something like Lem's _ S_ o_ l_ a_ r_ i_ s and in this year's "Gripe Session"
they specifically mentioned that as one they've been trying to find, but
cannot.

Programming

There was an art track, but no science track (apparently no working
scientists wanted to come out to Springfield on the weekend--I wonder
why?).

                    _ T_ h_ e _ P_ a_ n_ e_ l_ P_ a_ n_ e_ l
                        Friday, 7 PM
             Josepha Sherman, Michael Jan Friedman,
              Mark Keller, Evelyn Leeper, Eric Van

(This was the first panel that I was ever on, so I'm not sure how
good a summary of the panel I can give, being as my effort was spent in
paneling rather than note-taking.)

A good panel should be entertaining, informative, or both.
Informative is better during the day; entertaining is better right after
meal break and in the evenings when everyone is starting to run down.
To have a good panel, you need good panelists, not ones who monopolize
the panel or drift off the subject. You also need a good subject. Some
of my examples of overdone panels were "Word to Screen," "Screen to

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Word," "Book Collecting," "Feminism/Fat/Fandom" (or any two of those),
"World Building" (which is almost always "World Building 101"--don't
they ever offer an advanced course?), and "Arthurian Fantasy." People

in the audience offered the opinion that "put-down" panels were also a
bad thing. On the positive side, someone suggested a panel on
"Political Heroic Fantasy"; many thought this was an oxymoron. Panels
on lesser-known authors was another suggestion. And people seem to like
the "Tips for Writers" type panels.

Someone asked if there was a "one-fan-per-panel" rule. No one was
sure, but I think people agreed that five people was about the maximum
desirable panel size. I said (and I think many agreed) that panelists
should not attempt to panel with under the influence of any controlled
substance (including alcohol).

(Sorry if this isn't too coherent. I was distracted by the need to
said witty and profound things, or at least fake it.)

_ M_ e_ e_ t_ t_ h_ e _ V_ I_ P_ s_ P_ a_ r_ t_ y
Friday, 8:30 PM

I was a guest at this (because I was on two panels). However, I
discovered the difference between VIPs and just IPs--VIPs
(professionals) got a place to sit with a namecard; IPs (non-
professionals) got to wander around. I didn't stay very long, because
we had arranged to meet some friends for dinner at 9 PM to discuss the
plans for the 25th anniversary party for UMassSFS (a.k.a. UMSFS) to be
held at Noreascon III. I did get to see Laurie Mann in her third change
of clothers for the day (anyone who has time to change clothes that
often at a convention isn't working hard enough!).

Dinner: The Student Prince

However, several of our friends had gone early to dinner and we met
them returning as we were going there. This was annoying, since I had
basically skipped out of the VIPs party because this was the only time
to meet these friends, and now I missed that also. Still, there were
some of us left and it might had been difficult getting a table for all
of us--the place was, as usual, packed.

_ C_ o_ n_ v_ e_ n_ t_ i_ o_ n_ o_ l_ i_ c_ s _ A_ n_ o_ n_ y_ m_ o_ u_ s
Friday, 11 PM

This panel showed no signs of starting at 11 PM since the VIPs
Party was still going in the same room, so we went to the Hobokon party
instead. Someone said this eventually did take place. The Hobokon
party was serving alcohol, which was supposedly a non-no for an "open"
party, but no one seemed to be enforcing those rules this year. They
were serving Jersey beer and Blatz beer, which some may claim aren't
real drinks anyway.

_ W_ h_ y_ N_ o_ t_ C_ h_ a_ r_ l_ e_ m_ a_ g_ n_ e?
Saturday, 11 AM
Elise Krueger, Ellen Asher, Michael Jan Friedman, Shariann Lewitt

This was instead of the "obligatory" Arthur panel, so what did they
spend most of the time talking about? You guessed it: Arthur. They
kept explaining why people wrote about Arthur (more readers know about
Arthur than Charlemagne). Of course, more readers know about Arthur
than Charlemagne because more authors write about him. Arthur is easier
to write about; he is basically fictional and Charlemagne is real.
Arthur is a hero; Charlemagne is an administrator, and an epic requires
an heroic flaw. Over and over they kept returning to Arthur--the next
panel on this topic should be forbidden to mention him (though then
they'll start talking about "the 'A' person").

Of course, one reason that Arthur is better known and more written
about is that we (don't ask me who the "we" they kept talking about are)
come from an English heritage, not a French one. Someone suggested a
story of Charlemagne returning as a liberator of Quebec, which led to
the question (unanswered) of whether Charlemagne was more popular in
French Canadian literature than in United Statesian ("American" just
doesn't seem the right word here).

It was claimed that there were some interesting aspects to the
Charlemagne story. For example, because the French threw out the Moors,
"we" (there's that "we" again!) can drink wine and eat pork. Alternate
history was certainly one of the ways discussed to bring the Charlemagne
story to the speculative fiction field. Again, Arthur was fantasy,
Charlemagne was real. It was eventually concluded that what Charlemagne
needed now was not so much a Malory or T. H. White, but a John Boorman.

A few Charlemagne-based works were mentioned: _ T_ h_ e_ S_ o_ n_ g_ o_ f
_ R_ o_ l_ a_ n_ d,
Ludovico Arisota's _ O_ r_ l_ a_ n_ d_ o_ F_ u_ r_ i_ o_ s_ o, L. Sprague De Camp's
_ C_ a_ s_ t_ l_ e_ o_ f_ I_ r_ o_ n,
Poul Anderson's _ T_ h_ r_ e_ e_ H_ e_ a_ r_ t_ s_ a_ n_ d_ T_ h_ r_ e_ e
_ L_ i_ o_ n_ s Penguin Books' _ L_ i_ v_ e_ s_ o_ f
_ C_ h_ a_ r_ l_ e_ m_ a_ g_ n_ e by Einhard & Notker. There was also something that sounded
like "William Curtnose epics," but many of the people there seemed more
intent on showing off their French accents than on communicating to the
majority of the audience, so I'm not really sure what it was. A
reference work on the Merovingians versus the Carolingians, _ H_ o_ l_ y_ B_ l_ o_ o_ d,
_ H_ o_ l_ y_ G_ r_ a_ i_ l (Michael Baigent et al), was also cited.

(I had planned to go to the "Mac and Me: Electronic Publishing for Fans" panel, but 1) I forgot, and 2) it was in the Tara and that made it a nuisance to get to. But before this panel I was in the Green Room where Laurie was in outfit #4 and decided to go back to her room for outfit #5. Of course, that was because she discovered her daughter had thrown up on outfit #4....)

_ B_ o_ o_ k_ s _ i_ n_ t_ o_ M_ o_ v_ i_ e_ s
Saturday, Noon
Barry B. Longyear, Scott Ciencin, Gary K. Wolf

    I only caught the end of this. When asked what books the panelists wanted to see made into movies, Wolf answered, "_ D_ u_ n_ e." Longyear mentioned two or three of his books (he seems to be one of the leaders in the new trend of plugging one's own books on every panel, and it's getting downright embarrassing). This attitude was particularly strange since he claimed he had gotten a better deal from Moscow on _ E_ n_ e_ m_ y_ M_ i_ n_ e than from Hollywood.

_ M_ a_ g_ i_ c _ a_ n_ d_ H_ i_ s_ t_ o_ r_ y
Saturday, 1 PM
Susan Shwartz, Bill Forstchen, Esther Friesner, Tim Powers,
Melissa Scott, Judith Tarr

    This started with the panelists pushing their latest books--one of them (I forget which) claimed to be a member of the "Book of the Month Club" for having a new book almost every month this year. In fact, that was a large part of the panel--when asked about anything, panelists tended to respond with, "Well, in my book _ R_ e_ v_ e_ n_ g_ e_ o_ f_ t_ h_ e _ S_ o_ r_ c_ e_ r_ e_ r_ s I tried just that approach...." The first question was whether panelists use existing magical systems or make them up. Powers claims that they're all made up anyway, so changing the rules of voodoun slightly to make the story better is acceptable, for example. Tarr prefers the "magic as science" approach, which is also what Scott used in _ A_ r_ m_ o_ r_ o_ f _ L_ i_ g_ h_ t. Unfortunately, most of the rest of the panel was promotional

rather than informational.

_ S_ h_ o_ r_ t_ F_ i_ c_ t_ i_ o_ n:_ T_ h_ e_ C_ u_ t_ t_ i_ n g _ E_ d_ g_ e
Saturday, 2 PM
James Patrick Kelly, John Betancourt,
Anne Jordan, Charles Ryan, Sheila Williams

   Little was said about short fiction; the topic was really what was
the cutting edge of speculative fiction. Science fiction is seen as the
battleground of the war between the English majors and the science
majors. Cross-over authors have a hard time of it. Several people
(included Kelly) claimed Margaret Atwood's _ H_ a_ n_ d_ m_ a_ i_ d'_ s_ T_ a_ l_ e was not
realistically extrapolated and hence not really science fiction, but
everyone seemed willing to accept Suzette Haden Elgin's _ N_ a_ t_ i_ v_ e_ T_ o_ n_ g_ u_ e,
even though it was much less believable. But _ N_ a_ t_ i_ v_ e_ T_ o_ n_ g_ u_ e was
published by DAW Books and was by a "science fiction" author. Another
type of cross-over mentioned was the techno-thriller. And then there
was cyberpunk, splatterpunk, steampunk, Blaupunkt.... Steampunk
(discussed later) was described as "bringing a modern sensibility to
historic events." With steampunk and other trends, it was claimed that
science fiction seems to be turning backward to the past rather than
forward to the future. Everyone is doing alternate history, for
example. (I can't really keep up any more.) But though readers talk

about cyberpunk, what editors are getting is contemporary fantasy.

   This panel (and others in this room) were marred by noise from the
next room--the audio system was much stronger than the partitions.

_ A_ l_ t_ e_ r_ n_ a_ t_ e_ S_ e_ x_ u_ a_ l_ i_ t_ y_ i_ n _ S_ c_ i_ e_ n_ c_ e_ F_ i_ c_ t_ i_ o_ n
Saturday, 3 PM
Joan D. Vinge, John Dumas, Delia Sherman, Gina Villa

   Vinge started by asking what "alternate sexuality" is. The
panelists agreed it included redefining gender roles and redefining the
family and encompassed gay and lesbian sex, inter-(sapient)-species sex,
and transexualism (transexuality?). As an example of redefining the
family, one panelist mentioned Anne Rice's vampires, who form a family

though not related in the traditional sense. (However, as someone said, they are related by blood!)

Sherman offered the opinion that sadists were reprehensible (I forget in what context this remark was generated), which triggered a discussion of voluntary versus involuntary "victims," and led one panelist to suggest the idea of "American Gothic" in black leather and garters. Further additions to the list of alternatives were solo sex and appliance sex ("The Brave Little Toaster gets pregnant"). Though there was some of the same tendency to equate "alternative sexual lifestyles" with "homosexuality" as at the Readercon panel, I though this panel managed to avoid sliding into that trap; whenever someone drifted that way, someone else would bring up other variations (e.g., appliance sex).

The discussion drifted into a debate on whether future societies should always be portrayed as accepting toward alternative sexualities, or at least if not accepting, then wrong in this refusal. All this smacks of putting a requirement of political correctness on authors' writings which I would think science fiction fans would be among the first to object to. Somewhere in all this discussion the question of religious attitudes toward alternative sexualities was raised and someone started talking about how if there were an Islamic future how intolerant society would be, because after all, in the past Islam was strong on forced conversions and such. I pointed out that when it came to intolerance and forced conversions, Christianity didn't have a pristine record either. Frankly I'm getting a little tired of how many people feel entitled to attack an entire religion because of the actions of some of its followers. But if you identify _ t_ h_ e_ i_ r religion with some of the more outrageous promoters of it, they get all upset. It is unfortunate that the normally tolerant science fiction community feels that Islam-bashing is quite all right. It isn't.

(As an aside, is it possible that many religions go through a "holy war" phase about 1100 to 1300 years after their inception?)

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(Samuel R. Delany was scheduled to be on this panel but could not attend.)

                            Saturday, 4 PM
Patrick Nielsen Hayden, Jim Frenkel, Evelyn Leeper, James Mann, James Morrow

     By the time this panel rolled around, I was a little more calm
about it, plus I had a little more time to prepare. Neilsen Hayden
introduced Jim Frenkel and James Morrow, giving a couple of sentences
about each of them, then turned to me and said, "I really don't know too
much about you; why don't you introduce yourself?" Not cool. I
probably should have mentioned that I write book reviews for _L_a_n'_s
_L_a_n_t_e_r_n, but being new to this I hadn't prepared a stock self-
introduction. (Take this as a hint to new panelists.) When we were
asked for some beginning comments on how to be a better reader, I
responded that at first I was going to say one should get a strong
enough lightbulb, a comfortable chair, ... but then realized that
wasn't what was meant. I said what seemed the best way to be a better
reader was to read better books--if you read Steven Brust's _T_o_ _R_e_i_g_n_ _i_n
_H_e_l_l without having read Milton's _P_a_r_a_d_i_s_e_ _L_o_s_t, it won't be
nearly as
meaningful. If you've never read Dickens' _O_l_i_v_e_r_ _T_w_i_s_t, you won't see
the similarities between that and H. Beam Piper's _O_t_h_e_r_ _H_u_m_a_n_ _R_a_c_e.
Another panelist mentioned the alarming number of fantasy "fans" who
love the "Shannara" series but have never read Tolkien. Of course,
there were some who felt this was too much like insisting on "culture
bites" a la "Cultural Literacy," which they seemed to scorn. While I
don't think the items chosen for "Cultural Literacy" are the best
possible set, I do think there is some validity to the concept. I just
finished reading an article by Timothy Leary in _M_i_s_s_i_s_s_i_p_p_i
_R_e_v_i_e_w in
which he feels obliged to add a footnote explaining who the Axis was in
World War II and who the Allies were. Such a footnote would make me
worry about the author, the audience, or both. But back to the issue at
hand.

     I got some debate when I said that if people don't start becoming
better readers when they are young, they'll have great difficulty doing
it later, by which I meant that if when you're in college you're still
moving your lips when you read and reading very slowly, you will have a
lot of trouble reading enough to read widely. Other people were
promoting reading other forms of literature to learn to read better:
drama, essays, poetry. Especially poetry. I'm not sure why the
promotion of poetry has suddenly become a big thing at science fiction
conventions. Someone mentioned Chaucer and Nielsen Hayden said that
Chaucer was definitely fannish--I wonder what he means? One thing noted
was that you can read for different things, e.g., you can read for
ideas, you can read for writing style, you can read for story, ... and
all of them require a different style of reading.

     Two books were recommended: John Ciardi's _H_o_w_ _D_o_e_s_ _a_ _P_o_e_m
_M_e_a_n? and
Ezra Pound's _A_ _B_ _C_s_ _o_f_ _R_e_a_d_i_n_ g. (These were also recommended at

Readercon, but then many of the same people were on both panels, so that
isn't surprising.)

          _T_ r_ u_ e_ C_ o_ v_ e_ r_ s: _ T_ r_ u_ t_ h_ i_ n
_ P_ a_ c_ k_ a_ g_ i_ n_ g_ f_ o_ r_ B_ o_ o_ k_ s_ a_ n_ d
_ M_ a_ g_ a_ z_ i_ n_ e_ s
                    Saturday, 6 PM
     Ginjer Buchanan, Beth Fleisher, James Gurney, James Warhola

     Buchanan started by explaining that books are scheduled two years
in advance of publication. Cover conferences occur about thirteen
months before publication and involve the editor who chose the book, the
art editor, and marketing people. The author is not involved. The art
director then talks to the artist, who draws some preliminary sketches,
perhaps based on his or her own ideas, perhaps based on the art
director's suggestions. S/he may or may not get a complete copy of the
book. It is possible that the art director will reject all the ideas,
but usually the choice of artist and job specification avoids this.
Then there is the blurb and the back-cover commentary (no one seemed to
want to take responsibility for these). The panel ended up with a
spirited exchange between them (the editors mostly) and the audience
regarding the current practice of having books by minor-author written
in the universe of MAJOR-AUTHOR. Many audience members felt that the
comparative type sizes used on such covers tricked many buyers into
purchasing books that they thought were by MAJOR-AUTHOR rather than
minor-author. Buchanan denied this and pointed to continuing strong
sales for the "Robot City" series, claiming that such deception would be
noted after the first book or two and if buyers/readers objected, sales
would have dropped off.

               Dinner: Peking Duck House

     We had quite a long wait for dinner and had to rush somewhat so
that some people could get back in time for the Guest of Honor speech--
which ran all of about eight minutes! This restaurant is very popular
with the Boskone crowd, but someone should warn the management ahead of
time--they could have used some more servers (and kitchen staff, I'm
sure).

          _W_ h_ y_ Y_ o_ u_ D_ o_ n'_ t_ W_ a_ n_ t_ t_ o_ B_ e_ a_ n_ S_ F
_ W_ r_ i_ t_ e_ r

Sunday, Noon
James Morrow, James Patrick Kelly, Shariann Lewitt, Tim Powers, Cat Pryde

Most of the panelists began by explaining that either they weren't full-time writers or they were incredibly poor or they had someone else supporting them. Lewitt does "work for hire" (e.g., writing books in series under a house name--you didn't really think there was someone named Kenneth Robeson who wrote all those "Doc Savage" novels, did you?) Morrow depends somewhat on his wife's job. Powers took ten years to get to the stage where his writing would support him. Pryde made only $6927.13 on writing last year.

Powers thinks books are evidence of his existence, but he likes to have written, not to write. Someone quoted Hemingway that writing is not a full-time job. They all bemoaned the fact that being a writer means they have to promote their books on all their panels (I wonder if they saw my notes?!). Kelly and others said they did enjoy the feedback on their writing they get from people at conventions. But several felt that Boskone was all politics and back-stabbing; this was clarified later to mean that the authors and editors were doing the back-stabbing, not the convention organizers. The need to work at conventions (by meeting with editors and such) took away a lot of the pleasure authors might have attending them. Powers in particular avoids working at conventions and self-promotion in general. He explained that if by holding a book-signing in a local store he managed to sell fifty more hard-cover books than he would otherwise, he was still only getting $50 for having to dress up and spend an afternoon sitting around in a store. If he sells fifty more paperbacks, he doesn't even make back bus fare.

As for the adulation of their fans, those who are pursued by fans hate it and those who are not pursued by fans hate that. James Patrick Kelly made a point of saying that he has never had sex at a convention (I think several audience members wondered if that was a challenge). There was a lot of discussion about the wearing of a ribbon--people look at the ribbon, then peer at the badge. If you're lucky they then say something to you (preferably not "Are you anybody?"); if you're not, they give you this look like, "I've never heard of you," and walk away.

Steampunk and Post Steampunk

Sunday, 1 PM

Ginjer Buchanan, Esther Friesner, Tim Powers, Brian Thomsen

"Steampunk" was apparently a term coined to cover K. W. Jeter's *Infernal Devices*, Tim Powers' *Anubis Gates*, and James Blaylock's *Homunculus*. Three novels do not, however, a genre make. Even with the expected addition of William Gibson and Bruce Sterling's *Difference Engine*, this seems like a skimpy category.

The characteristics given (none seems precise enough to be called a definition) include "a throwback to science fiction's origins," pseudo-science with no explanation (as in Shelley or Verne), Victorian settings with people "with modern sensibilities," and so forth. Jeter's *Morlock Night* was also mentioned, as was *The Wild Wild West*. I would suggest such works as *Dr. Who & the Talons of Weng-Chiang* and some of the Sherlock Holmes pastiches which had him defeating mad scientists with "earthquake machines" and the like. Kipling's "The Eye of Allah" was cited as perhaps the earliest example of this sort of work, though certainly not "steampunk."

Is steampunk science fiction or fantasy? I suggested it was science fantasy, which seemed to satisfy most of the panel.

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Powers talked about the need to research this sort of work thoroughly. If he has Byron saying something, he doesn't need to prove that Byron said it, but he'd better be sure no one could prove Byron *didn't* say it. He also feels that people become harder to understand the further back in history you go and claimed that people before 1500 are totally alien to us. Hence when authors write about them they tend to adapt them to modern audiences much as Mexican food is adapted to United Statesian tastes in "Mexican" restaurants in this country. As an example of how alien these people were, he told of an instrument he found described in an account of the time, said instrument being used to

push the hands of people who were being boiled in oil away from the edge of the pot. I pointed out that this was not so alien, since if one went back only 45 years, one could find similar items in the death camps of Europe. (For that matter, one can probably find them in the offices of the secret police in many countries today.) If you think all this sort of thing went out hundreds of years ago, it's too easy to say, "Look at how inhuman they were and how much better we are," instead of looking at how inhuman we _ s_ t_ i_ l_ l are.

    This being at the end of the panel, there wasn't any time to follow up on it. I suspect that cyberpunk, splatterpunk, steampunk, and all the other punks will eventually merge into their parent genres: science fiction, horror, science fantasy. These days movements are in, and anyone who finds similarities in two novels declares a movement. I'm surprised there isn't "space-elevator-punk" based on Arthur C. Clarke's _ F_ o_ u_ n_ t_ a_ i_ n_ s_ o_ f_ P_ a_ r_ a_ d_ i_ s_ e and Charles W. Sheffield's _ W_ e_ b_ B_ e_ t_ w_ e_ e_ n_ t_ h_ e_ W_ o_ r_ l_ d_ s.

    I finally figured out what it is about Friesner on a panel that annoys me. She has this way of talking in which at the end of a sentence she drops her voice and starts ... talking ... very ... slowly ... as ... if ... revealing ... a panelists have these days if that they seem to go into these "wouldn't it be neat if..." modes which would be great were it not for the fact that the answer is often, "No.")

                    _ S_ F_ M_ y_ s_ t_ e_ r_ i_ e_ s
                    Sunday, 2 PM
        Rich Bowker, Scott Ciencin, Beth Meacham, Andi Shechter

    The panelists began by stating what has been observed before: that it is difficult to write a traditional "puzzle" mystery in the science fiction genre. It a traditional mystery, the reader must have all the clues necessary to solve the mystery, yet in a science fiction milieu there is often unexpected technology, different mores, etc. I mean, if it turns out that the butler did it by teleporting in from Venus and the detective solves this because the butler left because epsilon traces in the teleportation chamber and these epilson traces could only have originated on Venus.... Well, you get the idea. The easiest way to combine the two genres is with a minimal science fiction background and a mystery plot (hardly anyone does a minimal mystery background with a science fiction plot--Sam Spade meets alien invaders).

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And then followed the usual complaints about publishing/marketing. Where should such cross-over novels be shelved? Apparently you can't convince chains to shelve them in _ b_ o_ t_ h "Mysteries" and "Science Fiction/Fantasy." Of the books listed below, most were filed in the "Science Fiction/Fantasy"; but the John Dickson Carr, Dickinson's _ K_ i_ n_ g & _ J_ o_ k_ e_ r, the Hjortsberg, the Leonard, and the MacLeod were in "Mysteries"; and the Deighton was in "Fiction." Go figure.

There was then the obligatory listing of books and authors: Isaac Asimov's robot mysteries; Alfred Bester's _ T_ h_ e_ D_ e_ m_ o_ l_ i_ s_ h_ e_ d _ M_ a_ n; George Chesbro's _ T_ h_ e_ B_ e_ a_ s_ t_ s_ o_ f_ V_ a_ l_ h_ a_ l_ l_ a and Mongo mysteries; Bowker's _ D_ o_ v_ e_ r_ B_ e_ a_ c_ h (post-holocaust) and _ M_ a_ r_ l_ b_ o_ r_ o _ S_ t_ r_ e_ e_ t; various works by John Dickson Carr; Glen Cook's _ S_ w_ e_ e_ t_ S_ i_ l_ v_ e_ r_ B_ l_ u_ e_ s, _ B_ i_ t_ t_ e_ r_ G_ o_ l_ d_ H_ e_ a_ r_ t_ s, and _ C_ o_ l_ d_ C_ o_ p_ p_ e_ r_ T_ e_ a_ r_ s; Len Deighton's _ S_ S-_ G_ B (alternate history); Philip K. Dick's _ D_ o_ A_ n_ d_ r_ o_ i_ d_ s_ D_ r_ e_ a_ m_ o_ f _ E_ l_ e_ c_ t_ r_ i_ c_ S_ h_ e_ e_ p? (hard-boiled detective); Peter Dickinson's _ G_ r_ e_ e_ n_ G_ e_ n_ e and _ K_ i_ n_ g & _ J_ o_ k_ e_ r (the latter alternate history); George Alec Effinger's _ W_ h_ e_ n_ G_ r_ a_ v_ i_ t_ y_ F_ a_ i_ l_ s (cyberpunk); Randall Garrett's Lord D'Arcy stories (science fantasy/alternate history); Joe Haldeman's _ T_ o_ o_ l_ o_ f_ t_ h_ e_ T_ r_ a_ d_ e; various works by Barbara Hambly; William Hjortsberg's _ F_ a_ l_ l_ i_ n_ g_ A_ n_ g_ e_ l; Lee Killough's _ D_ e_ a_ d_ l_ y_ S_ i_ l_ e_ n_ t_ s and other police procedurals; Elmore Leonard's _ T_ h_ e_ T_ o_ u_ c_ h; Richard Lupoff's _ C_ o_ m_ i_ c_ B_ o_ o_ k _ K_ i_ l_ l_ e_ r; Charlotte MacLeod's _ C_ u_ r_ s_ e_ o_ f_ t_ h_ e_ G_ i_ a_ n_ t _ H_ o_ g_ w_ e_ e_ d; Larry Niven's "The Long Arm of Gil Hamilton," various works by Mike Resnick; Wilson Tucker's _ T_ h_ e _ L_ i_ n_ c_ o_ l_ n_ H_ u_ n_ t_ e_ r_ s; Andrew Vachss' _ F_ l_ o_ o_ d, _ S_ t_ r_ e_ g_ a, and _ B_ l_ u_ e_ B_ e_ l_ l_ e (mainstream but listed as being of interest to science fiction fans); Jack Vance's "Demon Princes" series; Kate Wilhelm's _ T_ h_ e_ D_ a_ r_ k_ D_ o_ o_ r and _ S_ a_ f_ e_ H_ o_ u_ s_ e (or possible _ S_ u_ p_ e_ r_ H_ o_ u_ s_ e--the panelist wasn't too sure of the title and it isn't listed in _ B_ o_ o_ k_ s_ i_ n_ P_ r_ i_ n_ t); and Gary L. Wolf's _ W_ h_ o _ C_ e_ n_ s_ o_ r_ e_ d_ R_ o_ g_ e_ r_ R_ a_ b_ b_ i_ t?.

_ G_ r_ i_ p_ e_ S_ e_ s_ s_ i_ o_ n
Sunday, 4 PM

The gripe session was very low-key, with most of the gripes being of the administrative level (opening registration before the dealers needed to set up, providing microphones, etc.). There was little opposition to the "scale-down" policy that caused such an uproar last year. One fan who objected to it said he wasn't coming back next year, which just about everyone applauded.

Miscellaneous

The various upcoming worldcons had tables, so I could sign up for Confiction without having to send my check registered mail. (Yes, apparently you can send checks to the American agent--this was never made clear. Also apparently you can send United States checks to Holland.)

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Summary

As I have said, it wasn't perfect. But it was good enough that we'll be back next year for Boskone 27 (February 16-18, 1990; Guest of Honor Glen Cook). Given that it's back on President's Day weekend opposite the new Boston convention Arisia, and the Boskone after a Boston worldcon, I expect it will be smaller still, perhaps under 1000. It will be interesting to see how that works out.