

authors in alphabetical order: Anvil, Biggle, Harrison, Laumer, and Russell. Or rather the authors in the list are in alphabetical order, but the works will not be. That is, we will not even feel compelled to discuss the authors in alphabetical order. No, I don't just mean that we won't be discussing the authors in

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alphabetical order in the sense that the people discussing might have their names in alphabetical order. Nor will we be discussing the authors themselves so much as their books. But I mean that the authors' books may not come up for discussion in alphabetical order by their names. The authors' names. Nor the books' names. Neither the discussors, the authors, nor the authors' works need be discussed in alphabetical order. Well, I guess that the discussors wouldn't be discussed in alphabetical order, but what I mean is that they will not just be discussing in alphabetical order by the discussors' names. Nothing will need to be in alphabetical order at the meeting. I just meant that the list above of authors was in alphabetical order. I hope I have made that clear.

Of course if people want to discuss the books in alphabetical order, that will be fine with me.

2. I am pleased that people are submitting articles for the notice, but may I request that if at all possible that we get them electronically rather than on paper. This is not so much to avoid the odious task of typing your stuff in as it is to help save a tree. I try to look out for our big woody brothers. [If you are having trouble communicating electronically with us, call the Factotum at the number listed above. If you're having trouble with your phone also, I'm afraid you're out of luck. -ecl]

3. Incidentally, item 31 is an illustration of a corollary to Godel's Proof. Any sufficiently complex idea cannot be explained in any way that isn't somehow ambiguous and confusing. As Godel (I think it was) put it "clarifying things only confuses matters." See, I told you it was serious.

4. At least I think that was what Godel was saying. I never could quite follow what he was saying.

Mark Leeper
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STAR TREK: Missing Restraints
Rebuttal by John Francisco

I read Mahendra Pratap's "Star Trek" article with great interest, being very fond of the TV series and, to a lesser extent, the movies. In fact, in my adolescence I idolized Captain Kirk, but this I attribute to his supernatural abilities to attract members of the opposite sex rather than any other character trait.

With all due respect for the author, I was rather surprised at the article's point. Not that it wasn't a valid one. It's just that the lack of restraints on the bridge of the Enterprise is hardly a new topic. I remember it being discussed ad nauseum more than a decade ago along with the usual list of discrepancies such as:

1. Why did the Enterprise make a swishing sound as it passed by during the opening credits?
2. Why was every planet the Enterprise ever visited populated with English speaking humanoids?
3. Why was the Enterprise apparently not fitted with rest rooms?

4. Why did Kirk's weight fluctuate so greatly from episode to episode?

But all these comprise the most trivial of "Star Trek" musings. More sophisticated thought on the matter, thought which might be more appropriate for a magazine such as M_T_V_o_i_d, should center on more challenging questions like :

1. Why was the Prime Directive only observed in the breach?
2. How could Spock calculate odds on certain events without any previous case histories, and why did these odds inevitably involve fractional values?
3. Why, when they used the Enterprise in a time sling shot effect, didn't they run into themselves? (Particularly annoying in the episode "Return to Yesterday")
4. Why was Kirk affected by the Neuro-Neutralizer?
5. Why didn't Dr. McCoy prescribe lithium for himself?
6. Finally, and the one I find the most irksome, how could Spock mind meld with Nomad, a computer of mixed alien and human origins, or, given that it was possible, why didn't he also mind meld with other devices on board the Enterprise, like the warp engines or the transporter or any other troublesome piece of equipment for that matter?

I'm being somewhat less than serious of course, but to concentrate on the inconsistencies of "Star Trek" is to miss the greater value that it had and to some extent still has. "Star Trek" was television's first realization of serious science fiction. Some may dispute me on this, but remember that this was in the days before 2_0_0_1: A_S_p_a_c_e_O_d_y_s_s_e_y, in that dim time when science fiction on TV was embodied by such shows as

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L_o_s_t_i_n_S_p_a_c_e, T_i_m_e_T_u_n_n_e_l, and V_o_y_a_g_e_t_o_t_h_e_B_o_t_t_o_m_o_f_t_h_e_S_e_a.

Admittedly there was an occasional O_u_t_e_r_L_i_m_i_t_s or T_w_i_l_i_g_h_t_Z_o_n_e episode that showed some promise, but it was "Star Trek" that first treated space exploration and alien contact with any seriousness. In fact, one would be hard pressed to name a single show since "Star Trek" that comes close to presenting science fiction in the same light.

Which brings us to TV's latest attempt, S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k: T_h_e_N_e_x_t_G_e_n_e_r_a_t_i_o_n. I suppose that by using the "Star Trek" name the show will

have a guaranteed audience for the first few episodes at least. As do most other people who have even the slightest interest in "Star Trek," I have serious doubts that the show can survive without the original cast. However, I will be watching on Tuesday night, along with millions of other Americans, hoping that Dr. Smith doesn't sneak aboard.

BREAKING THE CODE
A theatre review by Mark R. Leeper
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"Boffin" is a piece of British slang. Literally, it simply means scientist. But I have never heard it used without more meaning tacked on. It would never be associated with someone like Carl Sagan, though he is indeed a scientist. The implication of the term "boffin" seems to be that somewhere around age 14 the person totally stopped developing his mind in anything but his scientific reasoning power. The boffin is mentally a little kid who has grown used to playing with very big and technically complex toys. The character James Stewart played in N_o_H_i_g_h_w_a_y_i_n_t_h_e_S_k_y, based on Nevil Shute's N_o_H_i_g_h_w_a_y, was a boffin. The king boffin was Alan Turing, a brilliant mathematician, computer scientist, and even a biologist. He did fundamental work in computer science defining the abstract computer, the Turing machine. While there were a team of mathematicians working on the problem, it is Turing who is credited with breaking Germany's Enigma Code, a message encryption system whose solution contributed in major ways to the war effort.

He was also apparently a mother-dominated homosexual. That the fact that he was a homosexual ever came to police attention was the result of his blundering. Removed from the field of science, he was a nail-biting, stammering misfit. This duality of personality, so brilliant and polished when dealing with science and yet so unpolished and insecure in his personal life, is the subject of Hugh Whitmore's drama B_r_e_a_k_i_n_g_t_h_e_C_o_d_e, based on Andrew Hodges's excellent biography, A_l_a_n_T_u_r_i_n_g:_T_h_e_E_n_i_g_m_a_o_f_I_n_t_e_l_l_i_g_e_n_c_e. (Curiously, both the title of the book and of the play are double-meaning.)

The Michael Redington production at London's Comedy Theatre starred John Castle as Turing. Castle is well-remembered for the role of Geoffrey, the son neither parent wanted for king in the film version of T_h_e_L_i_o_n_i_n_W_i_n_t_e_r. Castle shows impressive range playing the two Turings, one brilliant and self-assured, one awkward and insecure.

The play is a montage flashing backward and forward in time like the scanner on a television screen painting a complete picture from bits and pieces. Turing's homosexuality is seen as one more manifestation of his sense of wonder at the universe. In a life that in some ways parallels that of Robert J. Oppenheimer, we see him both honored and abandoned by his government.

The play includes details of his homosexual life and examples of his scientific reasoning, including a complete lecture on the nature of the brain. The staging is sparse and usually irrelevant to the action. Still, it is a lot of play. Strongly recommended for computer scientists, mathematicians, and just about everyone else.

[B_r_e_a_k_i_n_g_t_h_e_C_o_d_e starts previews on Broadway 11/05/87 and opens on 11/15/87 in the Simon Theater.]

NEAR DARK

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: The worst film I've seen in a theater this year. A vicious gang of vampiric bullies runs wild. Lots of blood and little thought.

What is the nicest thing I can think of to say about N_e_a_r_D_a_r_k? Well, they didn't bend too much the traditional rules for vampires and within those rules they showed something of how dangerous a gang of really mean-spirited (bloody-minded?) vampires might be. Beyond that, N_e_a_r_D_a_r_k is over three hours in a film so bad, every minute of watching it counts as two minutes off your sentence.

A guy picks up a girl who turns out to be a vampire. She bites him after what seems like and interminable period of time. This opening sequence turns out to be the high point of the film. Our friend is forced to join the gang of vampires to learn the trade of vampirism. Mostly he sees how the vampires bully and terrorize humans with their powers. The scenes of the bullying are long and violent and bloody and boring. There are a couple of ideas borrowed from Anne Rice's I_n_t_e_r_v_i_e_w_w_i_t_h_a_V_a_m_p_i_r_e.

Don't waste your time. Life is too short to watch movies this bad. Rate it -2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

DIRTY DANCING
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: Good story about a teenaged girl's coming-of-age at a Jewish resort in the Catskills of New York (actually it was filmed in North Carolina). Some very good dancing. The plot was a little contrived.

At least one film critic and one three-dimensional person have told me that D_i_r_t_y D_a_n_c_i_n_g is the S_a_t_u_r_d_a_y N_i_g_h_t F_e_v_e_r of the 1980s. I can see what they mean. The dancing hooks the kids and then they see a good story of human values anyway. It's a good way to solve the problem of "I don't want to see a film with character development. hey, let's get Mikey to watch it." The problem is that while the story is good, it is a little pat. Things work out a little too well. Life is not really like that. S_a_t_u_r_d_a_y N_i_g_h_t F_e_v_e_r is a genuine slice-of-life film. Things do not all work out right, but they do work out like they do in life. It is not true at the end of S_a_t_u_r_d_a_y N_i_g_h_t F_e_v_e_r that "all's right with the world," but some progress has been made and that is a victory. D_i_r_t_y D_a_n_c_i_n_g is a good film too. It is good like O_n G_o_l_d_e_n P_o_n_d. But it lacks the grit of S_a_t_u_r_d_a_y N_i_g_h_t F_e_v_e_r.

D i r t y D a n c i n g is the story, set in 1963, of how Baby Houseman (played by Jennifer Grey) comes of age during a two-week stay at a resort in the Catskill Mountains. (Actually the resort film is becoming its own sub-genre. The best of the lot is probably T h e G i g.) She gets involved with the resort dance instructor (played by Patrick Swayze), and Penny, a pregnant but unwed dancer (played by Cynthia Rhodes). Baby has a natural desire to get involved with people in trouble and try to set things right, but in doing so she risks hurting her own relationship with her father (played by Jerry Orbach).

The title refers to two or three steamy scenes of dancing, but really erotic "dirty" dancing is sort of a paste-on to the plot. Professional mambo dancing is much more important, but let's face it, who under 60 years of age would go to see a film called P r o f e s s i o n a l M a m b o D a n c i n g? When it got to video, it would end up with the instruction tapes.

Acting honors for the piece go to Grey, who really does seem to transform, but they also go to Jerry Orbach, who presents a real aura of integrity. He is sort of the father that everyone wishes they had. For being a little too neat and pat, this film gets a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

October on Cable
Short film reviews by Mark R. Leeper
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Every month cable dredges up a bunch of older films to fill up their programming schedules. the quality of these films is spotty at best. This month seems to have a better selection of filler films than usual. These films running on cable this month all rate a +2 or higher on the -4 to +4 scale, at least in my opinion.

 C o u n t r y (1984): One of three save-the-farm films that came out at

the same time. This was the only one that was really believable (though P_l_a_c_e_s_i_n_t_h_e_H_e_a_r_t was a good story). The people looked the part and acted the part. A strong piece of human drama. +2. Cinemax and Showtime.

F_u_n_e_r_a_l_i_n_B_e_r_l_i_n (1966): The producers of the James Bond films tried to have a second series based on Len Deighton's books about an unnamed agent (the films called him Harry Palmer). T_h_e_I_p_c_r_e_s_s_F_i_l_e and F_u_n_e_r_a_l_i_n_B_e_r_l_i_n were both good spy stories. (The series was killed when Ken Russell horribly mishandled B_i_l_l_i_o_n-D_o_l_l_a_r_B_r_a_i_n, the third film.) On the axis between action and believability, with Fleming at one end and LeCarre at the other, these stories sit nicely in the middle. Michael Caine plays the laconic anti-establishment agent. +2. Cinemax.

A_M_a_n_f_o_r_A_l_l_S_e_a_s_o_n_s (1966): This is probably my favorite of all time. In the days before videotape, I had it on audiotape and played it often once or twice a week. Thomas More is a man of wit and brilliance and, above all, integrity. The play itself is full of bitter humor and meaty ethical argument. It will not be for all tastes, but it is a fine film. +4. Cinemax.

O_b_s_e_s_s_i_o_n (1976): Brian DePalma made this film while Hitchcock was making his last film, F_a_m_i_l_y_P_l_o_t. Had I not seen the credits of the two films, I would have guessed that this was the Hitchcock. It is in the style of some of Hitchcock's best films and ranks with them. DePalma, who made Stephen King a household name with C_a_r_r_i_e, also seems to have discovered John Lithgow, featuring him in this film and B_l_o_w_o_u_t. +2. HBO.

O_u_t_l_a_w_J_o_s_e_y_W_a_l_e_s (1976): Clint Eastwood's best film, though B_r_o_n_c_o_B_i_l_l_y is not far behind. Eastwood is just one of several interesting and three-dimensional characters in a story that is as much about the shape of the country at the close of the Civil War as it is an action Western. +3. Cinemax and Showtime.

I seem to remember T_h_e_S_p_y_W_h_o_C_a_m_e_i_n_f_r_o_m_t_h_e_C_o_l_d, based on the novel by John LeCarre, as being pretty good, but I haven't seen it since the 1960s. It is on Cinemax.

Conspiracy '87
Con report by Mark R. Leeper
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[Details of pre-Brighton trip omitted -ecl]

(Part 1)

August 27, 1987: There was an uneventful trip to Brighton except that we have already bought more books than we wanted to on the whole trip and the lug-around is getting a bit much. Our room is nice for 41 pounds/night. The Massachusetts people are three to a room, further from the festivities, the room is older and has a bath but no shower, and they are paying 75 pounds per night.

We got to Brighton about 6:15 PM and got to our hotel by about 6:45 PM. At 7 we went out for fish and chips. I had a giant slab of skate and chips for about \$5.65 American. We talked to some local fans from Scotland over dinner. Afterwards we looked for a nice place to have our anniversary dinner (which will be tonight).

The weather is just about perfect for Brighton, which is to say grey and cold but not raining. I hope this weather stays nice through the weekend rather than turning grey and cold _ a _ n _ d rainy.

We went back to the room and listened to a humourous radio play (as far as I can "humourous" is like "humorous" only drier). This one was about some poor benighted fool who was bucking the system to try and get his train to work to run on time. It was not really science fiction but was in many ways like _ H _ i _ t _ c _ h _ h _ i _ k _ e _ r' _ s _ G _ u _ i _ d _ e _ t _ o _ t _ h _ e _ G _ a _ l _ a _ x _ y.

I wrote in my log. After a little while the phone rang. Dave Bara had arrived. We went over to his hotel and talked with him and Kate until about 11:30 PM, occasionally being entertained by a very strange hotel manager who talked in baby-talk to the hotel cat.

Well, then back to the hotel and I stayed up and worked out on the graphics calculator on the problem of how far away the horizon is at very heights above the water (mid-ocean).

This morning I discovered my stomach did not like the skate last night as much as my mouth did.

We had English breakfast (it comes with the room), including things like grilled kidney, grilled tomato, fruit, and a few things a little more prosaic. The mushrooms were pretty good.

After breakfast we registered for the convention, cashed a check, bought some lime candy, and returned to our room to map out what we wanted to do for the rest of the convention: what talks we wanted to go to, etc. (Oh, we did go to the Dealers' Room to see what books were for

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sale.) At about 3 PM we went to the discussion on what are the style differences between British and United States science fiction. Now, I had thought that United States science fiction was pessimistic, but the general opinion of this panel seems to be that American science fiction has much less downbeat writing than do British books. Toby Roxburgh bemoaned that it is getting harder for new British writers because each book has to be a known quantity to make a profit. American writers sell much better here than British writers. I see this as affirming my belief that readers don't want downbeat stylistic experiments. One editor told the story of getting one of her company's books returned to her by mail with a note saying, "Please refund my money or send me another book. There is something wrong with this one. It doesn't make sense."

The next panel was a retrospective on H. G. Wells. It started with Brian Stableford quoting Wells talking about the forward-thinking man versus the man more rooted in the present. He had his giants in F o o d o f t h e G o d s represent that forward-thinking man.

Wells himself turned against his own "scientific romances" later in his career. He began to think and write about them in a condescending way.

This panel was not so much discussion but Stableford reading a lecture.

Before this lecture, in fact, at the British science fiction panel, I talked to a sightless fan who happened to sit next to me. I asked him about his science fiction reading. Apparently this is his first convention. He reads some of the classics but as I had guessed, he could read only what someone else thought was a classic. He'd read authors like Clarke, Asimov, Wyndham, a little Ballard, but he was hearing about the new writers for the first time. A sightless fan who can read only what has been translated into Braille is really reading a different science fiction than the rest of us.

It is interesting that my writing of travel logs, which I started eight years ago, has spread to Evelyn and now Dave Bara is writing one too. The three of us are sitting in the Wells lecture writing logs. There is a room full of people listening and in this one little pocket there are three people writing like mad while they listen. It must be an odd sight.

New point made by Stableford: between the World Wars Europe was rebuilding and the speculative writers were more used to seeing horrors of the present, so stressed more horrors of the future. Again a reason why European science fiction is more downbeat than American science fiction. I guess I hadn't realized European science fiction is considered so downbeat. I have been complaining that American writers who might be catching the imagination of youth are instead writing anti-technology diatribes thinly veiled. When a nationality gets in a position where wonder is dead and the future is something to fear and

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dread, then the young decide to make it while they can and the prophecies become self-fulfilling.

In Japan the popular entertainment is full of high-technology and battling robots. Now the robots thing sounds bad but it retains its sense of wonder. The philosophy is that we may have bad times ahead, but technology and a human will-to-live will eventually triumph. The way of the future is to live among the magic machines. Authors should be allowed to write about whatever they want, but science fiction is more self-fulfilling prophecy than self-averting, and a civilization that never dreams and only has nightmares really does have reason to fear the future.

I guess once you get into the practice of having nightmares, your nightmares get to be worth having.

Well, after the Wells presentation we met up with Kate, who'd left early, and Saul Jaffe who is a big honcho on the electronic bulletin board SF-Lovers Digest. (He edits the digest from Arpanet). Dave, Kate, Saul, Ev, and I went to the Aberdeen Steak House. I had lambchops; Ev had the grill platter. From there it was back to our room for some writing. Dave and Kate went to their room but later brought Cynthia to our room and we talked till about midnight. Then the women went to their respective rooms. Dave and I went to the Odeon Theatre to

see E_x_p_l_o_r_e_r_s. The con has rented a local theater next to the convention center and after it would normally close they are showing two films a night--theater prints. That is a very nice touch.

E_x_p_l_o_r_e_r_s is the kind of story I loved to read when I was 10 or 11 years old. It is not great science fiction, but it has some charm and considerably more than I had expected. It came out of the Spielberg factory about the same time as an actively bad film called T_h_e_G_o_o_n_i_e_s and it got tarred with the same brush. I gave it a +1 and Dave gave it a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale. While it had a fair number of in-jokes, it also had a great respect for science fiction films in general and science fiction films of the 1950s in specific.

That went to about 2:30 AM and I set my watch to wake me up at 5:30 AM to see a film running in our hotel. I slept right through the alarm and woke about 6:30. It is now about 7:30 AM.

August 28 (1:13 PM): Breakfast was mushrooms, eggs, the like. After that we went to a poor excuse for a film called 9_9_a_n_d_4_4/1_0_0%_D_e_a_d. It had a good three minutes at the beginning and another good minute at the end. The rest was action scenes stuck together like pop-it beads. I rated it -2. Dave gave it -1. Evelyn liked it apparently and gave it a +1. Richard Harris plays Harry Crown, a sort of James Bond in an American gangster. He is the main character and the greatest characterization they give him is that he takes his glasses off and puts them back on a lot. This was directed by John Frankenheimer, who once did things like T_h_e_M_a_n_c_h_u_r_i_a_n_C_a_n_d_i_d_a_t_e. This is sheer garbage except

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for Bradford Dillman, whose inconsistent speech defect and erratic performance don't even reach the standards of this film.

Following that I saw the last half of two American television writers, Alan Cole and Chris Bunch, talking about why American television is so bad. At least a third of the talk was how they accepted garbage assignments and did them for the money only. It quickly became obvious that these people were Joe Valachi's of television. They were not so much critics of the system, but part of the system who were willing to talk about it. They were schlock writers talking about their own contribution to the problem. And the audience

cheered them.

Next Greg Bear and Brian Aldiss had a discussion about Olaf Stapledon. Olaf Stapledon was one of the great original writers. He writes books without characters that go on for more than a page or so. Instead he writes things that seem like history books but they go billions of years into the future. Aldiss told a story about how he stole a two-volume set of L_a_s_t_a_n_d_F_i_r_s_t_M_e_n, the only book he ever stole! He was in the army in the Pacific during the second World War and found them on the shelves of an abandoned plantation. The Army had taken over the house and the books were so much better than the banal conversation of soldiers so he looted them. And they were with him for the rest of the war.

Then came a panel on science fiction in the 1950s with a moderator whom I did not recognize, together with Bob Shaw and Bob Silverberg. They reminisced about Peter Hamilton, who edited N_e_b_u_l_a_S_c_i_e_n_c_e_F_i_c_t_i_o_n. Silverberg talked about seeing D_e_s_t_i_n_a_t_i_o_n_M_o_o_n in 1950 and when the lights came up he discovered John W. Campbell was sitting in front of him. (Ah--I am writing this as the discussion goes on. The joking moderator is Kenneth Bulmer.) As a thumbnail, what happened in the 1950s was a flowering of magazines, then books (both paperback and Science Fiction Book Club) killed off many of the magazines. Then the books backed out and at the end of the decade, other than a couple of magazines, Doubleday Books, and the Science Fiction Book Club, science fiction seemed dead. One of the audience asked why there was a move away from true science into psionics and similar false sciences. Silverberg seemed to want to ascribe it to the questioning of authority in the 1960s, but it clearly came much before that. It is tough to keep Bob Shaw on the subject. He is a heavy-drinking, joking Irishman.

Harry Harrison and George Hay next talked about John Campbell. Comment from Harrison: "Talking with [JWC] is like tossing manhole covers." Harrison thinks that modern science fiction writers "all have their finger up their nose." On one hand, he says that science fiction was invented by Campbell, but also that the modern writers do not write enough like the old days. Someone asked, if JWC were alive today, whose stories would he be buying? Harrison says it would be a bunch of better authors whom Campbell would have developed himself. Also, there is the old story about Godwin's story "The Cold Equations," about the stowaway

girl who added too much mass to the rocket. Godwin rewrote it eight times saving the girl. Campbell would not accept the story until Godwin killed the girl. Either physics says the girl added too much mass and would have to go or there was no story. Of course, it is a better story without weaseling around the laws of physics.

The next presentation was on 50 years of Superman in various forms. A few interesting points were made. Clark Kent was a combination of Kent Taylor (the actor who was the brother-in-law of one of the creators of Superman) and Clark Gable. Kryptonite was invented because the radio actor Bud Collier wanted to go on vacation for two weeks and so they wanted to reduce the character he played, Superman, to a state of just coughing for two weeks. A number of interesting writers have written for comics, including Edmond Hamilton, Alfred Bester, and Ed Binder.

(11:13 PM): This is one of those "you had to have been there" stories, but I will try to tell it anyway. I was walking back to my hotel a few minutes ago and in front of the Metropole Hotel was a man handing out convention news update sheets out of a Gestetner stencil box. He had apparently just told a non-convention member how to find someplace in Brighton. In a slurred voice, the non-member was saying, "Sanks. You have been a big help." Then as he walked away, he said back over his shoulder, "Good company, Gestetner!"

After the panel we went to a Greek restaurant for dinner. Evelyn, I, Kate, and Saul Jaffe went. We rushed back after dinner to see Lars von Trier's 1984 Danish film T_h_e _E_l_e_m_e_n_t _o_f _C_r_i_m_e. All the scenes were shot in near-darkness and what you can see is in sepia tones. It involves a policeman investigating a crime in a post-destruction Copenhagen in which the whole city is flooded six feet deep in water. The soundtrack is indistinct and the film moves with a snail's pace.

August 29 (11:27 AM): So it was back to the room and a discussion with Dave as to how bad the film seemed to be.

At about 8:30 PM we went to the netnews party. I am sure that Evelyn will cover it and it was described on-line at the party. I talked to various people about what they already had done in Britain and what they will be doing for the rest of the trip. Not thrilling but it passed time.

After being there an hour or so, I returned to our room for a while, somewhat ahead of Evelyn. I did some reading and a little before midnight Evelyn showed up and I headed out for a movie at the Odeon. Like E_x_p_l_o_r_e_r_s, this was to be a theatrical print of a film shown in a genuine theater. I had better than a half an hour so I stopped on the way for what was billed as a reading by horror writers Ramsay Campbell and Clive Barker of their own stories.

Barker is a new, young, horror-story writer who has some really off-beat ideas for horror stories. Stephen King is popular but he

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really does not have enough new and original ideas in horror fiction. Barker is considered to be the r e a l current superstar by most people who read a lot of horror novels rather than by those who read best-sellers. Barker, however, did not show up. Campbell did. Campbell's novels have a great deal of respect among horror readers. He is sort of the grand old man of horror writers. A case could be made that either is the most popular British writer of horror fiction.

Barker did not show up but I did see what Campbell is like. Campbell has the same sort of looks that Bob Shaw has. Campbell looks a little younger and more jolly, but they are both plump and red-faced. However, if you notice, their most prominent feature actually changes. Each has at the end of his right arm a piece of glass, a mug-like object. But it changes in cycles. It will be full of a clear, brown, foamy liquid, then it will be half full. Sometimes it will be nearly empty. Then suddenly it will be full again and the cycle will begin again like it did ten minutes before.

I had time to hear one horror story from Campbell, a sort of whimsical thing about going to see a neighbor's slides of a holiday trip and not realizing the neighbors did not come back quite human. GASP!

After that I had to be off to my film. M u t a n t is a low-budget American film that is a re-telling of N i g h t o f t h e L i v i n g D e a d--as many cheap horror films are--with toxic waste given this time as the reason for the transformation. I gave it a zero rating. Dave gave it a -1.

August 30 (8:30 AM): Well, I am now a day behind. That is a pretty constant state. At a convention, a trip log can not stay up-to-date for more than a few minutes at a time or it is a bad science fiction convention.

Breakfast was a carbon copy of every other breakfast at this hotel. I had a spirited discussion with Evelyn about science fiction. She would like to see the category just go away. In fact, she wants to see all categorization of fiction go away. I cannot represent her reasoning

but I think it revolves around the fact that borders between types of fiction are not well-defined so she wants to remove all distinctions. I guess this would involve having just one big fiction section in libraries and bookstores. She would still have non-fiction categorized because it is useful to have it categorized. From my point of view she is forgetting that the distinction between categories of non-fiction may be just as indistinct and indeed the distinction between fiction and non-fiction. Her same arguments, carried to their logical ends, would mean just having all books alphabetized by author without regard to content. This is really, I believe, at basis an old complaint that Evelyn has had that there is a science fiction ghetto. People look down on science fiction and other people will read only science fiction. What results is a "categorism" (to coin a word) that is akin to racism. I agree that the current system of categorizing fiction has problems, but it is still more useful than not having genres of literature

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acknowledged. I was also a bit surprised when Evelyn asked me why my approach in the argument was to pick holes in her proposal rather than to defend the current system other than to say it seems to work. This seems to me to indicate a fundamental misunderstanding in the rules of logic. One does not have to defend the Status quo in logical argument; if a change to the Status quo is proposed, it becomes the battlefield. One side defends the change; the other side attacks it. A discussion of whether the s t a t u s q u o is good or bad is pointless.

In any case this is all moot. People categorized literature because it was useful to do so. I think most people realize that categorizing fiction or anything else may have problems, but it is more useful than ignoring distinctions. When Evelyn convinces a single branch of B. Dalton to alphabetize all their fiction I will believe her proposal might catch on. When I was growing up most public libraries did alphabetize all fiction together. Then they started putting stickers on the spine of the book. A rocket in an atom meant it was science fiction. Then many of the science fiction books were pulled out and put in a bookcase labeled "science fiction." Today most libraries acknowledge genres and have sections for science fiction, mystery, westerns, etc. It would appear most people like it that way. To the best of my knowledge, bookstores depend on the fact that people really do find categorization useful and have for a long time.

Following breakfast Evelyn and I continued on to see the art show. It is a fair-sized art show but not really all that great. It is spread out over two rooms but nothing all that impressive. One mother was carrying around a three-year-old. She pointed out one of Charlene Taylor's "Teddy Bears in Space" pictures, assuming the teddy bears would interest the child. In a loud voice the child said, "I don't like that." I told Evelyn that I hated to admit it, but the child was absolutely right. At one time Taylor was promising but her cutesy artwork now is just a little sickening.

Evelyn then went to do some autograph hunting and I looked around the huckster room. The noon panel was on horror writing. This time Clive Barker did show up. He looks a lot like a young version of Eric Idle and he smokes big Cuban cigars that smell up the room. Campbell was there with his beer, too. Someone suggested that the popularity of horror might stem from its unfamiliarity, that these days very few of us have ever seen a corpse. However, as Campbell pointed out, the Italians surround themselves with dead in catacombs but they also make films like T_o_m_b_o_f_t_h_e_B_l_i_n_d_D_e_a_d with very realistic-looking corpses on horseback.

They were asking who in the audience actually were in professions where they had to come in contact with the dead. One nurse talked about it, but what really surprised us was that Kate Pott in our own group did the most. We all knew she worked in a nursing home and we figured it was doing things like caring for people and cleaning up. Apparently, a big part of her job is what she called (and what got a big laugh) "post-mortem care." This involves dressing and making up the dead before they are removed to mortuaries. Kate knew she was fascinated by Clive Barker

and his work. Now Barker seemed to be just as fascinated with what she does. Barker interviewed her for about five minutes in front of the audience, getting details of what post-mortem care was and what various tasks it involved. Barker had a real curiosity for detail. He made wisecracks through the whole thing, but it was clear the details might be useful to him in horror writing.

A couple of other interesting points of the panel: One told an anecdote about a hospital that had hired a hunchback to carry around the dead bodies. It apparently included carrying them across a courtyard. It was not the kind of job that has a whole lot of applicants, nor could

it pay very well. This rather scruffy-looking unfortunate was willing to take the job. But the hospital had to fire him because patients would look out their windows and see this hunchback carrying around dead bodies and the image was a little too evocative of cheap horror film.

For a couple of hours we walked around and socialized. I had a ginger beer with Cynthia and Kate. I went back to the room, got the book catalog of all our books, returned to an inexpensive book-seller, and bought a couple of inexpensive books of horror stories. I sat and talked with Dave while he drank a beer. Then at 3 PM I went to a panel on how necessary violence is in literature. There were people like Ramsay Campbell and Orson Scott Card. These are people who do tend to put some violence in their writing. They discussed the recent Hungerford massacre in which a gunman killed a dozen or so people. These are relatively common in the United States but in Britain this sort of massacre is very unusual and has been front-page news for over a week. They talked a little about the psychology of reaction to violence. When people hear that the gunman killed 13 people there is not a lot of reaction. When they say that the first woman killed was a mother who was laying out a picnic lunch for her two small children, that personalizes her and people feel a lot worse. What they said was more profound than just that personalizing makes writing more real, but for brevity I won't go into it all.

One comment I ought to make. Last British convention I was impressed with how much more polite and interested in science fiction British fans were. Things seem to have deteriorated somewhat in the last eight years. There seems to be more drinking, more drunkenness. The punk movement seems to have made rudeness more of an "in" thing. The partying sort of American fans were less willing to cross the Atlantic so the American fans are no better or worse than they were eight years ago. But now that same level of etiquette is much closer to the level of the British fans. If anything, on the whole Americans seem better-behaved than the British.

Next came one of the more interesting discussions, at least as far as I was concerned. Several people who had written books on the science fiction film got together to discuss the question of when was the "Golden Age" of science fiction film. Most seemed to share my feeling that it was the 1950s when it has its greatest number of new ideas.

When T h e m!, for example, came along the producers were trying to create a new science fiction idea. After that, a lot of films just tried to recreate T h e m!. I think one thing that contributed was that science fiction films were only a small part of the studios' budgets so they afford to be somewhat experimental. In 1965, 2% of film ticket sales were for science fiction/horror/fantasy films. By 1985 that figure jumped to 58%. One of the more interesting and humorous speakers is Bill Warren. Warren really knows science fiction films, has a good sense of humor, and actually looks very funny. He must be extremely near-sighted; his glasses are very thick and shrink his eyes down to looking like they are about 2/3 scale. The effect is sort of like Ernie Kovacs used to have for a character he called something like Percy Dovetonsils. In any case, it really adds to his facial expression.

(5:00 PM): People were meeting in the lobby of our hotel for dinner at 6:15 PM, so I went back to my room to work on this log. On the way we stopped at a local candy store and I got some very good lime chocolates.

Cynthia came up to the room with us and we talked. Dave came up later. At 6:15 Dave, Cynthia, Evelyn, I, Dale, and Jo went out to eat. We found a very good Italian restaurant. I had an appetizer of Spaghetti Carbonara. First time I tried it and it was very good. I also had chicken in a cream and tomato sauce and it tasted very good also.

The convention masquerade was scheduled to start at 6 PM, but these things never start on time. Well, after dinner Cynthia and I set off to see the masquerade. Well, for once apparently the masquerade did start on time and was over by the time we got there. While we were in the convention center I did see the local newspaper had done a big spread on the science fiction convention. Now this convention and most these days try to discourage the wearing of costumes (except at the masquerade). However, the paper had managed to find some attendees who'd come in costume and their picture was plastered over the front page (whose headline was "The Force Is with us"). They then got some women, dressed them up in outfits that tastefully combined a futuristic look with the look of hookers, put dayglow orange wigs on them, and sat them into the convention center to sell the newspapers with the odious story. Regrettably, nobody strangled them and unfortunately some people actually bought newspapers from them. Newspaper coverage of science fiction conventions uniformly misinterprets things to an appalling degree. I am not too impressed with a lot of fans, but they are a heck of a lot better than they appear in the papers.

Dave Bara had said that he'd read that the BBC would be showing T h e D e v i l R i d e s O u t at 8:45 PM, so we went back to our room to watch it. Unfortunately, it was actually scheduled for 10:55 and we'd already planned to be busy at that time.

Back at the room we read and eventually Dale and Jo dropped over to join us watching the movie which we weren't going to see. So we did have someone to talk to. At 11 PM, we went to the Odeon to see D_e_a_t_h L_i_n_e, a very weak British film concerning a killer in the London Underground. He apparently is the offspring of Irish laborers trapped in a cave-in in 1890. There are some humorous lines, but overall it isn't that good. So that was it for Saturday, day 3 of the 5-day convention.

Sunday is Hugo day. It is now 8:05 PM and I am sitting at the Hugo awards. Evelyn slept a little late, having gone to the Odeon movie last night.

A_n_s_i_b_l_e just won for fanzine. Brad Foster was fan artist. Dave Langford won for fan writer. L_o_c_u_s wins as semi-prozine. Terry Carr--editor. Jim Burns--artist. A_l_i_e_n_s--dramatic presentation. T_r_i_l_l_i_o_n Y_e_a_r_S_p_r_e_e--non-fiction. "Tangents" by Greg Bear--short story. "Permafrost" by Roger Zelazny--novelette. "Gilgamesh in the Outback" by Robert Silverberg--novella. S_p_e_a_k_e_r_f_o_r_t_h_e_D_e_a_d, Orson Scott Card--novel. Karen Joy Fowler--John W. Campbell Award.

August 31 (11:09 AM): If the last words are hard to read, I wrote them in the dark at the Hugo awards. Well, I am now over a day behind in covering the con in spite of setting aside writing time. The faster I run the behinder I get. I now have a good deal more respect for people who write convention reports. I thought it was pretty tough just writing a trip log where you might do two things that need a describing in a day. At a convention you are doing something different each hour and what you do for one hour may need as much description as a visit to Hampton Court. What is more, when you are done at Hampton Court you get on a train whilst Hampton Court is still fresh in your mind. Here you go running to the next event and you cannot write while you are running. Okay. So here goes. Back to the fray.

Yesterday we had a late breakfast, much like every other breakfast we have had here. The major variation is whether there are kidneys put out on the buffet. Some days there are; some days there are not. It actually does not impact greatly on my breakfast, but is a noted variation.

(to be continued)