



John Hertz's Westercon Notebook

Westercon 52, "EmpireCon", July 2-5, 1999
DoubleTree City Center Hotel, Spokane, Washington

Friday at 1:30 a.m. I arrived from the airport, a reasonable time, or so my airline, baggage handlers, and shuttle driver evidently thought. The first moments of a con at that hour are babe-like. One as yet knows nothing. While I peered hopefully at a kiosk of flyers, down the elevator came Dave Howell lamenting that the Cheeko party, last of the night, had closed. We sat in the lobby. He had chaired the Foolscap literary con, as he put it "about flat things," and has been running the on-line service Alexandria Digital Literature. Why do people read? He said, I like to relax. I said, I like to be invigorated. And so to bed. A few hours later when I first ran into con chair and warlord Bob Ladd, the name on his badge was "Sounds like an Ops problem", in, I hasten to add, big fat letters.

Attendance was 1,423 including one dog. The con was fresh and vigorous. It brought Yuri Mironets, a professor of English in Vladivostok who has been teaching American and British s-f. It was run by people who, at Jon Gustafson's warning "You're a bunch of maroons if you do this," achieved enlightenment. "Yes! We're maroons! We're Team Maroon!" and they put on khaki shorts, maroon polo shirts, and straw boaters with TEAM MAROON upside down. It was full of art demos and workshops, and even had a Fanzine Lounge. It drew A.J. Budrys, Aileen Forman, David Hartwell, Robin Johnson, Connie Willis, and Ben Yalow. A river ran through it (well, almost), there was

a Charles Looff carousel in the park, and amazing astounding fantastic fireworks on Independence Night. There were too many Guests of Honor, but they were Alicia Austin, Larry Baker, C.J. Cherryh, Ellen Datlow, Barbara Hambly, Wendy Pini, and Kristine Kathryn Rusch, and besides, isn't it a proud thing we have so many women worth honoring?

Well before the con it was plain the committee was not long on experience. This hurt the crops, and I think kept people away. For some while the challenge in fandom has been managing one's ignorance. The burden lies especially on concoms. How do we arrange for "I didn't know that", "I didn't think of that", to be not last words, but in the middle, with something wonderful to follow? Eventually a more-knowledgeable fan or two, unasked, made suggestions. Mostly the concom took it well. Some were adopted, and the result was probably an improvement. There is, after all, no one here but us chickens.

At the crack of dawn, i.e. noon, I went to moderate "Everyone is an Editor" with Hartwell, Howell, and Edd Vick. On the Web no one is an editor, which was our topic: is that good or bad? So we asked what editors are for, and whether, where they do not exist, it will be necessary to invent them. Hartwell said editors are responsible not to the writer, but to the reader: since publishers hire them for this, Web publishers may find a need to spend resources likewise. I said, people try to



Garth Spencer
Passed out in the fanzine lounge
Saturday, 7:45pm, Westlcon 52/Empirecon, Spokane

escape editing for fear of wrong rejection. From the audience: we don't want to SUBMIT. Vick said, I want to publish something better than I have before. *The Economist* ran a report that the Web isn't selling products, but services, most of which are finders. We'll believe in finding, but we won't believe in refining. Editing is itself art, and art is part of life, I said; the Inter-

My love of God has barred me from occupying myself with the hate of Satan.

Rabi'ah al-'Adawiyah

net, a labor-saving device, clarifies and reveals quality. Howell said, just after Gutenberg there were presses everywhere; all that shook down, as the Web may.

The hotel untangled my room snarl, putting Fred Patten, Art Widner, and me across from the Fanzine Lounge; who could complain? There Graeme Cameron and Garth Spencer were in charge. Various folk, including me, had brought handfuls of this and that. There was no duty roster to arrange for someone present and in charge whenever the room was open; that would have allowed a display of historic fanzines or a sales table, but as it was, two racks held a reasonable sample, and people dropped in. Sometimes there was refreshment. In Operations, seeking rosettes to give as a hall costume judge, I found buckets of roses for strewing before Emperor Jon Gustafson. I pondered this as I went to moderate "The Case for Reason." There Budrys said he quit the *Chicago Sun-Times* almost the same day

as *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, so Rusch said "I was the editor when he quit. I'm irrational." Budrys said, "Mr. Spock pretends, but he's as emotional as anyone. Most so-called emotionless characters wouldn't work without emotion." Baker said we like to see characters overcome competent enemies by spunk. I said, when religion was fashionable, we mocked monks and priests; now, wanting new fall guys, we write pratfalls for the more-rational-than-thou. Walter Parker in the audience said, maybe Rational People Having Trouble with Emotion are written by emotional people having trouble with reason. Rusch said, we rarely see an s-f creature wholly emotional. From the audience: because we don't assign emotions where we see no intellect. Willis said Mark Twain made the case for reason: after a hot stove a cat won't sit on a cold one either.

After Opening Ceremonies there were hundreds of glass dishes of vanilla ice cream, pots of caramel, chocolate, whipped cream, peanuts, cherries. Forman confessed dropping *Glamour*, to start a new zine, *Bebop*; "Have you ever tried to think of a fanzine title with Arnie Katz in the room?" At dinner Widner, like me a single-malt-Scotch fan, told how Gary Farber drank Michelle & Harry Howard's Lagavullin; also how Harlan Ellison took exception to a story Widner ran in *YHOS*, phoning to Widner's cabin early one morning, and flooring him with this evidence Ellison read his fanzine. On the party circuit Baker's fiancée Jacqueline Passey waited impatiently to turn 21 at midnight. Eight belly dancers arrived with bowls of candles. Lance Oszko threw a Gdynia for Eurocon 2000 party with mushroom caviar and *pierogi*. The filkers sang "So if you have to be a frog, I'll be a frog with you" and "The heart of the Apple Lisa never died." Steve McDonald in his oaken brassbound voice japed,

I will not sing along.

Keep your stupid song.

We're the audience!

It's you we came to see.

You're not here to train us; you're here to entertain us.

So get to work, and leave me be.

Saturday morning I went to see Elinor & Buz Busby, Janice Gelb, Mike Glycer, and Roger Wells do "The World of Fanzines." Gelb said the Internet satisfies needs. Glycer said, so do cons, with travel cheap: people who do fanzining enjoy it as an artform. Wells said, paper and print encourage reflective thought. Gelb said people lurk on the Internet; on paper we can be more personal, knowing whom we talk to. Milt Stevens in

the audience suggested letters in con Progress Reports. At lunch Gelb told George Alec Effinger she has the Daredevil he wrote. We all acknowledged Effinger as a man without fear. On to moderate "The Worst Future You Can Imagine, and How to Get There", i.e. how in writing to work up to a disaster the plot needs. How do people arrive at a horrible result they don't want? One way, observed Ray Vukcevich, is "Good for me bad for you," e.g. creatures who appear to us, but not themselves, as implacable incomprehensible hostiles. The Wombat asked, "Who's going to be the bad guy?" Another way, said Jan Lars Jensen, is "Be careful what you wish, it may come true." Another is lethal precautions, as in *Level 7* (1959); or else "Oops, no countermeasures." Another, said Cameron in the audience, is cover-ups, as in Philip K. Dick, Robert Shekley, Jack Vance. By way of writer's technique, an author can control the focus so characters only ask what the author is prepared to answer; e.g. in *1984* the focus is held so close on Winston Smith and Julia that much escapes our notice. The other shoe would have dropped if anyone had remarked how much escapes our notice in fandom.

There were 86 artists in the Art Show, with 1,041 pieces and 288 in the Print Shop; 58 went to auction with 5 bids; total sales \$11,497. When a con com first asked me to lead a docent tour, I worried how I can't draw a straight line, until Kelly Freas admitted he'd recommended me. You seem, he said, to be able to say what you see. I'm recruited to organize them too. For this con I signed up Kev Brockschmidt, Lonnie Davis, Mark Ferrari, myself, Rachel Holmen, Margaret Organ-Kean, Thor Osborn, and Wendy Pini. Pini cheerfully agreed to do hers just before an autograph session, which as expected had a line a mile long. Holmen from the publisher's perspective described trying to perceive what would "read" on a cover, and hold inter-

Made dangerous by ignorance.

Larry Niven

est a year later. Ferrari pointed to composition and focus. Cornered into discussing his own work, he stood at bay before a cave troll whom a boy came and read to, surrounded by hundreds of purple crystals whose magic was no substitute; all this and more done in colored pencil. Ferrari beamed when we on his tour put into words what he'd tried to put into the troll's face. Elsewhere, in a Lela Dowling cartoon, two cats in fishbowl helmets landed on Earth to ask directions, and stopped a dog. A Judith Rauchfuss mask, diaphanous white cloth and feathers with tendrils curling two feet out, won Best 3-D and the popular-vote Best Wearable. Becky Thomson bought an R.L. Dietz astronomical, with coronas and Jupiter and lightning. Ruth Frey showed eight or nine Northwest Indian images. Mark Roland showed his etchings of forests with enchanted paths, and acrylics of strange cities bathed in gold light. "Battle's Aftermath" by Rena Bassilvergoran, a nude female human and male Klingon lying comfortably after their exertion, could have been Best Monochrome, and won Best S-F Theme: huge white space, strong figures delicately modeled, deep shadow. A more careless artist might have been cloying. Gail Butler's "Jurassic Tropical" tied for Best in Show, plesiosaurs and other cavorting water beasts that achieved color variety in a

narrow palette of blue and green -- tied with another piece of her own, and Ferrari's "Trying to Fit In", a weary teenage elf with his jeans and baseball cap, skateboard, and yard-wide butterfly wings. Ferrari also won Best Body of Work, and "Trying" won the popular-vote Best in Show.

Technical glitches were solved in time for Regency Dancing, but I missed the *Locus* Awards again; the Avram Davidson Treasury won Best Collection. Ladd arrived in Scots evening clothes. Mironets came; later in the con I gave him a couple of issues of *Vanamonde*. The room was chosen so people could drift by, and look if they wanted. I don't know why that always

A mind is not a vessel to fill, but a fire to light.

Plutarch

means crowding the door so as to block it for others, but there you are. Seeing a bevy of hotel staffwomen watching, I asked one to dance. In my hat someone left the hoax newszine *Love Among the Runes* (neat Minneapolis reference), which noted how the con com alphabetized under "T" panel titles that began with "the", and left room numbers off the real newszine's open-party list. The Pocket Program was a hundred pages long. *Love* duly fomented ire against the *Daily Frefanzine*, which I could not join since Konkin had, by Roscoe, quoted me accurately. Unlike him, strictly a bheer man, I was impressed by the cordial reception everyone had from the Arizona Westercon '02 bid (not "Phoenix", still considering Tucson), who brought their trademark home-made liqueurs, including root beer and mango. At the Toronto Worldcon in '03 party Tom Veal asked about quadrilles in Trollope's novels. At the Conolulu party James Daugherty thought he was beginning to reach locals in Hawaii.

Sunday at noon Holmen and I did a sort of presentation, "The Historical Perspective," with a costumer's flavor: how to learn about people in the past from their clothes, and thus reverse-engineer a future. Compare data, we said. Ask "What's missing from this picture?" A recurring muffled noise proved to be roars of laughter from the Business Meeting next door. I

Enlivened by wine, he shouted at the Moon to make it walk backwards.

Li Ho

attended as soon as I could. Dozens of fans addressed each other with exquisite propriety. The battle over substituting *Sturgis* for *Robert's Rules* was pyrotechnic. Close votes were taken by serpentine, all voters standing, then one by one resuming seats as they counted off. At length Kevin Standlee trumped Ben Yalow, and David Clark and I went off to the Fanzine Lounge. Later I found McDonald with Callie Hills in a corner outside the Art Show. He sang, "I need time to heal, I need time to grow, I need time to find out what I know." Hills took out the bass flute and they tried "October Sky." Down the hall were con and club tables. San Jose for Worldcon in '02, having fully, finally, and forever lost their San Francisco site, sped on under power of a disintegrating chocolate bar, like the space drive of Skylark Three. Judy Bemis leaned over to Bruce Pelz at the Los Angeles in '02 Westercon bid table. "What do you



think of a Sergeant at Arms with a Super Soaker?" Pelz said, "I think it's all wet." Portland, winning the 2001 Westercon, threw its own ice-cream social. Waiting for the ice cream, Walter Parker said "The new Foundation books lack Asimov's minimalism." That afternoon was Widner's First Fandom slide show. Here was Cyril "Hot-Foot" Kornbluth, a practical joker like a backwards pickpocket: he added things. The Chicon I committee in 1940, Bob Tucker, Walt Marconette, Mark Reinsberg, Richard Meyer, you've seen in *All Our Yesterdays*, but was you dere, Sharlie? Then E.E. Smith, whom Widner called the grandfather of George Lucas. Widner drove a 1928 Dodge, the Skylark of WooWoo, last model made by the Dodge Brothers. Jack Speer drove the Skylark of FooFoo. "Speer is still with us. He's hardly changed a bit. I hate him." A later no-space ship was the FooFoo Special, a car without a trunk, in which five fans drove on the Widneride from Boston to the Denvention in 1941. And we gripe about costs.

With Independence Day on Sunday, the Masquerade was that night, Don Glover the Younger directing; Betty Bigelow, Bridget Landry, Richard Stevens, judging; Kate Morgenstern, Julie Zetterberg, workmanship judges; David Bigelow, master of ceremonies. Darren Bost, Cheryl Glover, and Jeff Larson made a not-in-competition "Moosterpiece Theater" with big fuzzy anthropomorphic animal costumes, one of which was a cardinal mistake (i.e. bright red bird); later they brought another round as "Furry Tale Theater" (Master). The cartoony headpieces had nice clear lines. Also not in competition were the Royal Maroon Beer Belly Dancers, a surprise to all who missed the tip-off cartoon in the Art Show, a shock to all. Lisa Satterlund and Terri Sprecht, "Straight from the Fairytale" (Novice), won a Huge Trophy and Very Special Award for Extensive and Skillful Use of Expensive, Rare, and Beautiful Materials, i.e. miming "The Emperor's New Clothes." Glycer later asked "Isn't there a rule, 'no costume' is no costume?" but I certainly did not see anyone undressed. Linda Cronquist won a Workmanship Award for Historical Completeness, and Best Historical

(Journeyman), as "Sophia Mellisaiades, Court Lady of Byzantium," turbaned, robed, and appliquéed, which I couldn't appreciate from the back of the hall. Lori Hillard won the Gypsy Rose Lee Memorial Award (Journeyman) for "Ferengi Female", disrobing to reveal three cheeks. Stacy DeLoe won a Workmanship Award for Best Construction Details (Novice) in "Mei Mei's Coat of Stars." Cherie Harris won Best Novice as

The precision of poetry, and the passion of science.

Nabokov

"Kiddy Phenil" in white knee-boots and a blaster. Best in Show, Best Workmanship, and the truly striking entry of the night, was Lori Edwards, Anita Taylor, and Wayne Wallace, "Guardians of the Tarran-Tulla" (Master). In iridescent robes they glided on, staffs topped with glowing spheres. They posed. They turned. On their backs were satin sunbursts, into each of which crawled the kings of these guardians, three giant spiders. At the Foolsap party I saw the fireworks, with as many false codas as if orchestrated by Beethoven, and as breathtaking. This was also the Amy Thomson stamping party -- i.e. for a passport game running through the con. At the Vikingcon party, Bandit demonstrated "Telepresence", a headset with a videocamera image that allowed viewing by turning one's head as if on the scene. In the hall Ladd observed how my teaching Regency dancing resembled his teaching snowboarding. He was drinking with various beautiful women, which may have affected his judgment. I shouldn't make such puns.

Breakfast with Robin Johnson, who inquired after Lee and Barry Gold, and came to see me do "The SF Writers' Wish List" with Michael Scanlon. Scarce needing mention were more money for writers, and desire to read s-f; how about literacy? So we wondered what writing was, and what it's good for. Scanlon said, it's a means of transcending intermediaries. I said, it's explicit. From the audience: it's durable. Scanlon: it's low tech -- one forgets how valuable that can be. Can we increase literacy? From the audience: we can give people books. I said, we may have to sell them: gift books sometimes aren't even looked in the mouth. From the audience: we can write for kids. I said, literacy is rooted in love of the apt. Yet for all our woes, more books are sold than ever. Scanlon said they're coffee-table books. Johnson, in the audience, said they're manuals. Then there's more s-f sold than ever, too. From the audience: a lot is fantasy. I asked, why should that be easier? Scanlon said, it demands less rigor. From the audience: science fiction must show how it's possible, fantasy needn't. Scanlon said, we expect an archetypal fantasy landscape, so "urban fantasy" is a surprise. I cited Niven's Law that s-f is harder than mainstream because it can't merely refer to what writer and reader have seen. Then, in a few minutes, I was alone. Austin, scheduled for "Uses of Myth and Legend in Fantasy Art" with me, had fallen sick for a few hours. She sent a note saying she couldn't appear. Gulp. The audience stuck, and said "Try it." Sometimes I thought of the next contribution, sometimes another fan did, and we threshed them out together. Here's one use of myth and legend: as a peg to hang fantasy on. Here's another: to signal the presence of fantasy. What of cross-cultural images we don't recognize? That may be media-sensitive. Glycer in the audience

remembered a Howard Waldrop story where a fisherman caught a kraken; since it was in a book, Glycer could put the story down and go look up what a kraken was. Listening to a bard, that could be harder -- maybe the king could stop him; with a painting, one could walk away and return later. Or the art might have to introduce the legend, not vice versa. Another use: the artist might want a combination of features different from ordinary life. Another: to help redefine archetypes, or as I said "to persuade people to repack their baggage".

Long have I wondered "Why is Everything so Dark?" S-F was once a city of light; now Batman is a dark knight. The con put on Don DeBrandt, Howell, Kevin Murphy. Howell

When that day comes I will try to prevent others from oppressing them, as I now try to prevent them from oppressing others.

Macaulay

said "Because we're wearing sunglasses." This was a stroke. DeBrandt said "I like dark fiction." Murphy said, Goths have always been around. Howell asked whether KISS of rock music were dark stars. Murphy: if there are action toys, no. From the audience: freaking out the norms has grown harder. DeBrandt said, to freak former flower children, who were colorful, we go black. From the audience I suggested, we've bought the psychs' put-down myths. Someone cracked, "and you're wrong." Howell said there will be a next step. I was thus fortified for "How to Be a Middle-Aged Fan and Keep Your Dignity," the sort of topic about which Jerry Pournelle needles me "You know you wouldn't go to that panel if you weren't moderating it." Glycer, Scanlon, and Wells tried to help. Gelb and Stevens sat in the audience and leered. "Dignity?!" I moaned. People snickered agreeably at the propeller blades turning above my head. But turn the topic, and note how youthful fans are. We thought that no surprise when everyone was seventeen, but now First Fandom is eighty. Widner here in Spokane, and about to do Melbourne. Or Bob Tucker, said Gelb. We tend to disregard physical shape (though when Marjii Ellers left for After-Fandom three weeks later, her masseur said she had the muscle tone of a 30-year-old), but upstairs, citizenship in the Imagi-Nation is good for something. The discussion turned more profitable when a neo in the audience delivered her line, with courtesy and pathos: "I've been coming to these things for years and I can't figure out what they are." Of course we couldn't either, but she was right. We've never made it easy, but now that we fret whether fandom is graying, shouldn't we do a little better? Pretend you don't know anyone, and look at a Program Book, or a con flyer.

The hotel was friendly, but the food was outshone by Westercon 50, and I began to thirst for good coffee. The espresso stand in the Convention Center, which I patronized at the Masquerade, was closed. I found Sean Smith and went for a stroll. It was late on a Monday-off afternoon. Shops outside were closed. We reached the river, and some brick walks, and a cart with espresso and cakes. We talked of whether pigs have wings. Smith went on to see scenery,

and I went back for Moroccan dinner with Ladd, Holmen, and Howell. On the path I heard unmistakable music. It was the carousel. Never say we lack folkways. Loeff built it in 1909, thirty years after making the first one on Coney Island. It has a dragon and a tiger and two Chinese dragon chairs. Each horse is detailed to the nails in its shoes and the teeth to show its age. There are beveled mirrors, and rods sleeved in fluted brass. It runs on the original engine. I went round and round.

