

John Hertz's Westercon Notebook

Westercon 53, "Conolulu", July 1-4, 2000
 Sheraton Waikiki Hotel, Honolulu, Hawaii

The last Westercon of the Millennium; and the Year 2000: the year TWO -- THOUSAND. It had to be extraordinary, and it was. Its merits were splendid, its defects sorry. On the white sands of Waikiki Beach below Diamond Head it was surely our most beautiful. My first morning I turned left from the elevators and met ocean. The hotel was open on that side. It was open in front too, which sometimes drew breezes through the lobby. Why not? The air was balm. I live in Los Angeles; this weekend when I took a deep breath, I felt *better*. On Friday afternoon a woman sat showing how to make *lei*. I took one of golden plumerias. A *lei* is always given with a kiss. That being her only day, each remaining morn I stopped at a flower shop outside to buy another of a different kind: plumerias and purple dendrobiums, *ti* leaves and octopus-flower berries (*he'e*), ginger and red hibiscus. The *ti-he'e lei* was unlike anything I'd imagined. Later I saw Ctein with one. The woman at the flower shop liked s-f; we talked of Niven, Powers, and *The Bear Comes Home*. She said "Oh, a science fiction convention? Too bad I didn't hear sooner so I could plan to attend." There was not so much as an easel with a sign in the lobby.

Ctein was Art Guest of Honor; John Lorentz, Fan; Dan Simmons, Pro. Attendance was about 250. The Program Book was full of Bill Rotsler drawings made in advance for the con. He'd been charmed by the notion of Conolulu, and its committee, as who not? The credits page reminded us that Westercon is his birthday party, to which we're all invited, and asked us to raise a glass in his name on July 3rd. There was no Art Show. No Fanzine Lounge. Nine people in Programming devised half again as many panels. We had all hoped for a strong Japanese attendance, but this too failed,

*We make friends by doing good to others,
 not by receiving good from them.*

Thucydides

except for Shibano Takumi and his wife and daughter, bless them. The Dealers' Room



was scant but brave. Zane Melder had books drop-shipped. Jane and Scott Dennis embroidered shirts with the con's logo of an octopus in a *lei*, and for tote bags did two pictures, a sea scene with the octopus, and brilliantly a Gaugin island with a flying saucer just in view. In the halls, windows slid open wide.

Thursday night on the airplane I improved the shining hours by putting my fanzine into envelopes so they could be postmarked "Honolulu." A man next to me, seeing I had written about *Frankenstein*, said how superficial the movie treatments were, "and Mary Shelley was only twenty, wasn't she?" They really are out there. After landing I saw an airport bar still open, advertising mai tais. Of course I drank one, with a mint sprig and the first of the superb pineapple that followed me like a fairy godmother all weekend.

The ambient music was slack-key. I put the mai tai orchid behind my ear. In front of the hotel stood a sculpture of sea turtles. Turtle designs were woven in the carpets. The lobby floor was flagstone -- better for people going to and from the beach? Fred Patten was still up. Maybe fandom is widening, we pondered, as s-f grows more acceptable, thus including people more mundane than before: the reverse of a

Barbarian Invasion. Patten was the color of a lobster, but we ignored this, at least I did.

Often I had to rise early for mundane business by phone to the mainland. On those days I was sustained by breakfast in the hotel's best restaurant, the Hanohano ("magnificent") Room on the 30th floor, with pineapple, papaya even better if possible, and fine Japanese food. At 6 a.m. Friday I was shocked to see Gardner Dozois, but he was only going to a tour. Is this fair, he worried, to the people who couldn't attend? We voted for it squarely, I said, against Phoenix, at San Diego. In the halls, by way of reminding us not to smoke, ashtrays held orchids. The snack shop and the cheap restaurant both had *musubi* (rice balls), that most comforting of Japanese handfoods. The

Japanese culture is said to breed an ability to wrap things. These contrived with inner and outer cellophane to keep the rice and the little treat at the center moist, the dried seaweed crisp. I drank guava-papaya-pineapple juice and watched the ocean.

Two of Ctein's photos covered the Program Book, a third made the namebadge. He had a badge-ribbon "Artist." He set up a display, some being his work, some double-takes with Laurie Edison: when they traveled together, and both felt inspired to shoot at the same spot, they put the Ctein photo and the Edison photo in one frame, which they called "collaborations" and I suggested they might rename "diptychs." How plainly this proved a photograph no mere mechanism, but the product of the artist's mind. Their two views were very different, but not radically different -- that is, not at root. The counterpoint revealed an unstruck fundamental note. Ctein himself is a world master of dye-transfer printing, costly and labor-intensive, with longer tonal range than any other medium. For his display he begged and got intense light, which his prints almost soak up, showing color and detail in the shadows.

Darin Briskman ventured, "You seem to work hard to capture what the eye sees";

That care which is always necessary, and will hardly ever be taken.

Johnson

Ctein said "Yes, and it's fantastically difficult because the photographic process sees so differently from the eye." Surely God was in this place, and I, I, knew it not. Upon David Hartwell's recommendation Sean Smith joined me for mai tais at the Mai Tai Bar of the Royal Hawaiian next door. He brought Michael Mason. Then *sushi* in a conveyor-belt restaurant with Seth Breidbart, Saul Jaffe, Sharon Sbarsky. I forgot the *nattô* (fermented soybeans) that morning so had some in a hand roll. Back at the con I saw Minneapolis too (there's a synecdoche for you, George Flynn); Dean Gahlon and Laura Krentz, and Geri Sullivan who put copies of the *Minicon 34 Restaurant Guide* on the freebie table, startling the pros. "Look what I found with the fliers! Do you realize it's a Hugo nominee?"

On Saturday, "History of Westercons" had Steve Forty, Patten, Bruce Pelz, Lorentz moderating. Patten and Pelz told of "Bouncing Potatoes" in 1966. Also, they recalled the fried egg, or so it was billed on the breakfast check, that Rotsler drew a face on and Harlan Ellison entered in the Art Show as "Lord, How I've Suffered." When Pelz remarked that he still owned the name "FunCon", I observed from the audience that if he beat Mesa for 2002 (which he did) he could hold FunCon III. For 1984, with July 4th on Wednesday, Portland had proposed a con on the weekend before, Phoenix the weekend after, and a Los Angeles write-in

One seldom wishes to find fault with those who have defects, but are good-natured.

Lady Murasaki

both; the vote was close, packing the Business Meeting, possibly in more ways than one. Pelz said that while he was happy to demonize the Arizona climate, in fact we need venues there, and Albuquerque wouldn't be unwelcome either. How are we doing at passing on lore, I asked. Not well, everyone agreed; concons don't like to feel pushed. For which the rest of us suffer. Ctein gave the first of three printmaking demonstrations. Bridget Landry gave the first of two Mars Program updates. Hawaiians at a party in the ballroom next to ours wore dozens of different kinds of *lei*. On the lawn, the concom gave a generous reception, with a thousand nibblements: reversed maki sushi,

beef skewers with Thai chili jam, kalua pig on buns, tongarashi aki in shiso leaf, raw vegetables, tempura, fruit tartlets, brownies, and that papaya and pineapple. All vanished. With the sixth or seventh serving even we began to grow content, and by the time I went to teach Regency dancing some trays could actually be seen to hold food. The Mesa party served cactus candy and very decent margaritas. Mike Willmoth had valiantly accepted taking over the bid chair at the last minute. David Howell lamented the dreary slough of Broadway musicals; I said it was like the 17th Century collapse of English theater, intellectuals forsaking the groundlings, the temptation which is our bane.

The Hospitality Suite on the 31st floor, above even the Hanohano Room, served muffins, Japanese candies, macadamia nuts, and that papaya and pineapple. From the top of the hotel we had a grand view of canoes, kayaks, sailboats, surfboards, and swimmers. Some of the swimmers were turtles. Sullivan ran a count, which at one point had reached six in a single sighting, and a count of brides traversing the lobby, which at one point had reached nineteen in a day. We saw coral spawn. It was Sunday. Lorentz moderated presentations by Los Angeles and Mesa. Pelz wore an Aloha shirt, which Charlie Brown had oddly yet to do. Pelz and Willmoth each said, I think rightly, that a good Westercon size was about 2,000. I went to hear "If Short Stories Are the Root of S-F, Why Don't We See More of Them?", Grania Davis, Dozois, Tappan King, Beth Meacham, Larry Niven. Dozois said "People feel so burdened by time they don't want to commit to reading something they don't know they'll enjoy," hence long novels, and sequels. This horrid indictment was insightful. King ventured that in short forms evolution is faster, of ideas

His method lacked the important element of selection.

Churchill

and forms both. Meacham said there's more short science fiction, less fantasy; King said, heroic fantasy; yet Leiber, Vance, Manly Wade Wellman show it's possible. Davis said romance is almost all novels. From the audience I quoted Cicero's "Forgive me for writing such a long letter, I couldn't find time for a short letter." Niven said movies are short stories -- thus making a movie from a big novel is hard. Another in the audience: "I subscribe to an s-f magazine for a year, then if the stories were good I renew. Otherwise I try another. I haven't renewed in a long

time." Niven said a writer can get in training with short stories; besides, they're fun.

At the *Locus* Awards dinner Hartwell, King and I talked of classics. Time will tell, said King, who had enough novelty to be worthy. Is that what makes worth? I asked. Just now it's our current, Romantic criterion. In medieval times, Hartwell observed, "innovation" was an insult. Round my own table Tom Veal tried to say Patrick O'Brian had no sense of narrative, only incident, but he was put down, and would have been suppressed if we had a large canvas bag. Charlie Brown in front said "George Martin is the toastmaster because he finished his novel; Connie Willis isn't because she didn't

Wild words and fancy language.

Po Chü-I

finish hers." Tor Books won its 13th Best Publisher. Hartwell kept accepting awards for people, each time in a different Aloha shirt. Afterwards I saw the hotel's placard for us had been rearranged to CTHULU LONE O. Ctein said astronomical art has to be meticulous; you have to feel you're looking into the heavens -- that heavenly perfection. Jordin Kare had brought a traveler's guitar. Kathy and Jerry Oltion tried it. At the Boston for 2004 Worldcon party Michael Siladi said, "Having tried them all, I prefer macadamia nuts plain, no chocolate, no salt. Maybe I'm a purist." At the Seattle-Tacoma for 2003 Westercon party I suggested checking out lore. "Oh, we have lots of cons out our way," said the bidders. "How many are 'media'-oriented?" I asked. There was a silence. At filking Joe Ficklin sang "It's the faith she can place in the truth of a dream, the good she believes I can show."

With Lorentz in the chair, which he managed with discernment and wit, the Business Meeting conferred on Los Angeles the 2002 Westercon, to be called "Conagerie"; on Progress Report 0 were an Elephant, a Springbok, an Owl, and a Lion. There was no newsletter to report the voting. *Sturgis' Rules of Order* was deposed, *Robert's* restored. Lynn Gold wanted to revise the North-South line (By-Laws, Section 3.2) from 37° to 36° latitude so rotation would be truer to our ethnic groupings, but nobody could form a motion that would pass; this may recur. The concom was thanked overwhelmingly. Seventeen hundred people were not present to vote. On Saturday Ruth Sachter had adjured me, if I was so dissatisfied with the panel programming, to devise a panel myself. I called it "If I Make Something Out of

Nothing, Is It Mine?”, recruiting Hartwell, Niven, D.F. Sanders, and Veal; we took Monday across from a *Buffy* panel which until then had held the schedule alone, and besides, Veal couldn't do Sunday because he was out sailing. Anyway, when Fuzzy Pink and Larry Niven had gone to see a volcano (the con was almost called “Volcono”), Larry remembered Mark Twain's “Buy real estate, God isn't making more land” -- only He is. Thus our topic. We met in good time and people gathered. In the days of acquisition by conquest, we began, if while upon the seas you found a new volcanic island, it was yours. Today maybe not. Why? If you write a poem, it's yours. Why? Nor is that all; as Veal noted, if you buy land it belongs to you and your heirs forever, but your poem goes into the public domain a few decades after

An expression of diabolical joy came to Niven's face.

Charles Sheffield

you die. Hartwell had worked in the Flatiron, a New York building declared part of the public heritage, where putting in modern elevators took four years because ordinarily the building couldn't be altered. To whom did it belong? Why? I recalled the furor a few years ago when a collector who owned a great painting threatened to destroy it; evidently people felt that in some sense it wasn't his. In Vonnegut's *Happy Birthday Wanda June*, Hartwell said, a man destroyed a Stradivarius. I tried to moderate this.

Then I went to meet the Shibanos. Masquerade directors Christine and John O'Halloran had asked me to judge, and eventually I was made Master of Ceremonies as well. I like the custom that Masquerade judges dress up, but these honors befell me on-site, when I was unprepared to ready the Regency clothes for a second appearance. I realized that, at Honolulu, I could probably hire Japanese formal wear. Cross-cultural contacts are homework for s-f. In an office building across the street was a two-story establishment that dressed the local Cherry Blossom Queen festival whose winner went to meet the Empress in Tokyo. The Shibanos kindly went with me. In two visits I was measured, fitted, and dressed in *kimono*, *hakama* (divided-skirt trousers), and *haori* (cloak), with undergarments and wrappings. A formal fan, like the breast-pocket handkerchief in a Western tailcoat, was displayed only, never used. I feared a moment for the *mon* (crest, worn in five places); I didn't belong to any of the Japanese families. “Don't worry,” I was

They are without jealousy, yet have the courage that as a rule springs only from the sense of honor.

Usama ibn Munqidh

assured, “we gave you ‘ordinary commoner.’” At my insistence they watched and approved my walk, and corrected my bow. “This is what you would wear,” they said, “to meet the Emperor.” Its austere beauty impressed me deeply. I said, “I can't imagine being worthy to meet him,” which I hoped was the right answer. We made a procession back to the hotel. As usual it was full of Japanese. “You surprise them,” said Shibano-sensei. “Let them look,” I said. Lynn Gold was the other judge. Beginning the Masquerade was a Tacky Shirt Contest. Sullivan's was gaudy with clashing pockets. Charles Matheny, gorgeous in green with cranes, easily won Most Beautiful, which I explained was, in the circumstances, the booby prize. Krentz, in a matchless ensemble, patched, misaligned, with a propeller beanie borrowed from some helpful fan, won highest place, the Big Kahuna. While Gold and I deliberated backstage, James Daugherty conducted a Tacky Souvenir Contest, to applause, cries, and roars. We gave Best of Show to an A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. production by Jim Briggs, Landry, Kate Morgenstern, Greg Sardo, and Julie Zetterberg, “Babylon Five-O”, in red orange yellow green blue indigo violet and hot pink. Kosh in an Aloha shirt was eight feet high and five around. Book 'em, Dan-O. For my morning-after *waka* (formal poem, classically 5-7-5-7-7 syllables; below I scant one in emphasis) I sent

Who was that tiger?

They thought they saw strength and grace.

My kind teacher

Helped me find the rising sun

So its rays could shine on them.

Tuesday at noon I went to hear “What Are Editors Actually Doing?”, King, Meacham, and Melisa Michaels. The question had long burned in my mind. To no surprise Meacham explained “90% of our work is representing a book to the publisher throughout.” With every erg of politeness I could muster, I asked -- and Larry Niven later told me I sounded perfectly well-mannered -- “Could it be we who buy books don't notice anything but jolt and energy?” Meacham said “Yes, readers are tone-deaf.” Alas, alas. In fairness it might be asked if any of the work we expect from editors, in the wake of John

Campbell, ought perhaps to be upon authors. “And what am I to do,” asked Tom Doherty whom I met in the halls to talk of cabbages and kings, “when [Famous Author] sends me a 30-page single-spaced letter to insist that

In the end, after reading a series of seemingly unrelated anecdotes or impressions, we may nevertheless feel a great sense of intimacy with the writer.

Donald Keene

not a word of his prose should be touched?” In the Hospitality Suite with Tony Parker, Kim Brown continued on ownership. She disliked the “National Treasure” system to the extent it might, without a person's consent, leave in his hands what had been his property, while rendering it impossible to sell or even destroy. Ed Green expounded to Sullivan his Dog Pile theory of fandom: once a few people have done it... All weekend there was a buzz over the prospect of a substantial Japanese Worldcon bid. Exciting; what of the cost and awkwardness for many? Shibano-sensei had sent round a letter exploring a 2005 date, which now appears to oppose Glasgow; if not that year, when?

Pelz at length found animal crackers for his membership table. I went for drinks at the Sand Bar with Jane Dennis, Kent Bloom, Mary Kay Kare, and Mary Morman, mostly mai tais. That pineapple. Bloom and Morman had played piquet in Aloha shirts at Regency dancing. Thomas Benson showed his new Aloha shirt, possibly Best of Con with hula girls, the Space Patrol, and robots. I took a walk with Smith who, celebrating an improvement of his independence, bought a Montecristi, finest straw hats in the world. They aren't really woven under water. I never could bring him together with Veal, who would have liked our talk of John Chrysostom, first acclaimed for his golden

Without even knowing that one had to look!

Wole Soyinka

words, then exiled for the irritation of his preaching. I met Lisa Deutsch Harrigan, who said “Speaking of people you don't want to run into when you're doing something stupid...” Ctein said “We can do this rarely, for a lark.” It was time for the fireworks and my plane home. Kathryn Daugherty, the “beach chair” as she called herself, wrote me a thank-you note.