

# John Hertz's Westeron Notebook

## Westercon 55, July 4-7, 2002

### International Airport Radisson Hotel, Los Angeles, California

The first Westeron without Bruce Pelz. Writer Guest of Honor, Harry Turtledove; Artist, Ross Chamberlain; Editor, Beth Meacham; Fan, Robert Lichtman; too many again but good. Attendance 954.

If we're going to proliferate guests of honor, thought Pelz while con chair, or by our zoölogical theme "Ringmaster," let one be an editor. In this he was wise. Editing is the unnoticed art. Also the Fan GoH and the Artist too (can't we call them Illustrators? or Graphic Artists?) had long been active in fanzines. Even I might argue this is not indispensable, but it glistens. Our wide activity is valuable far above rubies, but fanzines are the blood, and the blood is the life.

Two months before the con he suddenly died. He had the most fanzines in the world; maybe he won. He'd done so much for or to so many that we were dazed by his loss. His wife Elayne, who had been Head of Administration, stepped up unofficially; she did not want to be, or be called, the chair, but she saw to whatever was left. Clearly the first order of business was that the show must go on. To her credit, and Bruce's, and the con committee's, it did.

He said last year in Portland that a reasonable Westeron attendance in a populous place like Southern California would be 2,000. So we were half size. The people who arrived were active fans, and though this is a regional con -- and in November the local

The life of solitude among a familiar crowd

*Dickens*

convention Loscon was larger -- they came from all over. Their knowing the ropes made them more immune to tangles, and they came not to gawk.

I had been promoting a sense of classicism as the left hand to our love of the future -- you who are left-handed can take that as you like. This year Head of Programming Mike Glycer agreed and set discussions of eight works, named in a Progress Report so folks could read up. What are classics in s-f? Can there be any? Is s-f of fifty or a hundred years ago obsolete, if for instance the future has already turned out some other way? I



They ask for things to be proved, when they have resolved not to believe them.

*Montesquieu*

proposed that a classic was an artwork which survived its own day, which was found to have merit even after times had changed. We could then think whether a particular work was a classic, and if so by virtue of what. Westeron LV's were all books, although as the Eisensteins' display at the 2000 Worldcon showed, we might have included graphics. Would you like the list now? Bester, *The Stars My Destination* (1956); Cameron, *The*

Aliens with whom one learned to consort without quarrelling

*Dorothy Dunnett*

*Wonderful Flight to the Mushroom Planet* (1954); Clarke, *The City and the Stars* (1956); Heinlein, *Farmer in the Sky* (1950); Hesse, *The Glass Bead Game*, sometimes called *Magister Ludi* (1943); Schmitz, *The*

*Witches of Karres* (1966); Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1831); Verne, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870). Two by women, two not in English, two from the same year, two from before 1900, two written for children, two done in films -- I wish we'd done that on purpose.

The first ring of my circus was Thursday, "Book Covers as Eye Candy" with Claire Eddy and Meacham. Meacham said covers have to reach people twenty feet away. Eddy said they have to reach wholesale buyers who see promotion pieces, and who under the press of numbers may be looking to reject. Meacham said a good writer may be a bad judge of cover art. I asked about interaction with graphic artists, for which with writers Campbell at *Astounding* had been famous. Eddy and

Still exclaiming at the effects of your own causes.

*Elizabeth I*

Meacham both called that unpractical. Tappan King in the audience quoted "The perfect cover is a window into another world," which sounds great but might have barred Paul Lehr or Richard Powers.

I missed another look at my roommate Art Widner's slide show of the 1941 Widneride to Denvention in order to help my other roommate Fred Patten with *Destination*. There was a time, Patten said, when he'd nearly memorized it. We marveled at the scope of its adventure; limited to our solar system it felt vaster than some interstellar tales. From the audience: Presteign the robber baron and Gully Foyle himself were

Opening my heart I listened to what you said.

*Han Yu*

stock characters with surprising depth, Robin Wednesbury was an original. Indeed there was a string of surprises. Compare Bester's inspiration *The Count of Monte Cristo* and both look better. Sue Dawe led the first Art Show docent tour. She observed how Margaret Organ-Kean got luminous water colors, letting transparent paint carry light reflected

from the paper beneath. Janny Wurts was now doing more reflected, less local color. Bjo & John Trimble, among the tourists, recalled Equicons in this very hotel, although this weekend we sometimes failed to out-think new management of a rose put under another name.

That night LASFS held its meeting -- every Thursday come heat or high water -- at the con in memory of Pelz. Patten's earliest

Men may be convinced, but they cannot be pleased against their will.

*Johnson*

memory was of Pecos Pelz in an amateur film from Westercon XIII in Boise. Larry Niven recalled Pelz arriving at the 1975 NASFiC from Australia with Niven's Hugo for "The Hole Man"; Harlan Ellison as GoH had told a dinner he was getting out of s-f; in an elevator when two new chums asked Niven "That looks cool, what is it?" he said "A Hugo" and they replied "Oh, we know what that is, is it one of Harlan's?" Niven despite this knock-down was able to answer "Yes, he's getting out of s-f and he's giving them away," which made life interesting. Ben Yalow recalled going to dinner with Pelz knowing one would be unhappy because Pelz drank Coke and Yalow drank Pepsi. Ken Porter protested all the talk of Pelz as a sweet guy. It was curious how "He was the most accepting person" -- as if this were our highest praise -- meant "He accepted *me*."

It had a high claim to forbearance

*Jane Austen*

We paid the price for scorning rhetoric as a liberal art when at a great occasion -- they are not all joyous -- though we talked on we could hardly speak. But Pelz was a giant, the emotions were real, and I stayed to the end.

On Friday morning I heard a little of "Creating Mythical Monsters," Connor Freff Cochran, Dawe, Robin Hobb, Harry Turtledove, Janine Young. Turtledove said monsters that look like us are scariest. Dawe and Young warned not to show too much: see how scantily we're told of the Balrog in the book *Lord of the Rings*. Then the last half of "S-F and Public Perception," Moshe Feder, Barbara Hambly, Cheryl Morgan, Niven. Feder said movies are good at impressions, bad at detail. Niven said starting new gadgets is what the rich are for, which the Soviets never understood. Karen Anderson's docent tour; Chamberlain's "Folly," a temple whose elegant columns were impossible, a many-pronged poiuyt, she called worthy of Palladio. Some art, she said, was sentimental,

not compelling. Pointing to a Morris Scott Dollens, she said "Fimbriation is post-Plantagenet, and I don't consider any post-Plantagenet heraldry serious."

I was not at any great pains to curb the exuberances of my natural levity.

*Ronald Knox*

In Operations there was, for some reason, a huge board for Interplanetary, the s-f game Widner invented. Bob Null said "Just as I unpacked it, Widner walked in." On the Trimble's docent tour Bjo, praising fabric handling in an asymmetric mask by Karey Leichel, noted "Hiding the shape of the eyes is a good disguise; a half-mask draws attention to the mask half." Continuing a topic from the previous night's Phoenix for '04

But this was to show an umbrella to a cat.

*Saikaku*

Westercon party, she said "I'm quite susceptible to seeing how a piece developed, through sketches." She remarked on Selina Phanara's strong use of color, and Mark Roland's saturated colors opposite each other on the Color Wheel.

Patten, Michael Engelberg (another secret astronomer), and I led discussion of *Farmer in the Sky*. I asked Engelberg if he wanted to mention his particular interest in Heinlein. He said "No." We spoke of identification. Mark Linneman in the audience said if one can't see some of oneself in a lead character, the story is harder to read. Patten wondered if the death of Peggy, the sickly daughter, was a manipulative story device. Engelberg said, on the contrary he didn't dwell on it. Patten asked how she got by the exhaustive psych tests. I said maybe the tests were bad, or too

That little mind could not temper itself to enter another's soul.

*Kipling*

far substituted for human judgment, or couldn't predict what pioneering would really need. John DeChancie in the audience said *Farmer* was as well constructed as the best of Steinbeck. Engelberg said the people were our own neighbors. Patten said, even when they aren't likable. That night at Regency Dancing, Laurraine Tutihasi warned me the Fanzine Lounge might close early. It was in a cabaña by the swimming pool. Milt Stevens ran it. I went to the Baen Books party. Hank

Reinhardt said he liked musicals, but there weren't any. I should not have joined him in singing from *Fiorello*.

Saturday morning on my way to *The Witches of Karres* I met Joyce & Arnie Katz, Lichtman, and June & Len Moffatt. The next day when Phoenix won, unopposed, I joined them as a Westercon Fan GoH, or GoH-designate, or something. Bruce Pelz paid his way, said Arnie. He was a Worldcon FGoH, I said, at forty-five (Noreascon II, 1980). Arnie said *fan* means *interactive*. For *Karres* I joined Engelberg, Laura Frankos, and Kevin Murphy. It drew the highest atten-

Anyone who publicizes his sins -- even in the context of repentance -- is considered insolent.

*Talmud*

dance of the classics panels. Likable. Judy Lazar in the audience said the girls were weird and competent. Engelberg called that rare for 1949 (when the first version was in *Astounding*). Jordin Kare in the audience said its universe was lived-in. I asked Frankos "What do your daughters think? They're all in it." She said "Yes, they are!" Murphy praised simplicity. From the audience: the Captain redeems everyone he touches. On my docent tour I had reached Kelly Freas' "Thinking Beyond the Edge," a nude silhouetted man seated on a disk in space, its edge milled, on its reverse Earth's continents, when Kate Morgenstern in a bathrobe arrived with a procession of acolytes, carrying soap and a rubber ducky on a pedestal. Morgenstern asked if I was near God, and when I

Bind your servants to you with courtesy.

*Pietro Aretino*

answered "Bathed" -- you never know when you might need *Starship Troopers* -- she blessed me. This variety of religious experience would recur at the Worldcon (see *Chronicle* 231).

At "Current Fanzine Review," Lenny Bailes, Marty Cantor who had done the Program Book, and Lichtman, in the audience I found Ken Forman folding *origami*. Arnie Katz asked "Do you see electronics as a medium or a delivery system?" Bailes said "You yourself were a pioneer with the graphics in *Jackpot*. But the Web is only now discovering what it can do." Katz said "Yes, people feud faster." Niven giving a docent tour said "I'm glad she tried it. I'm glad any artist tries anything." Cochran's tour was spectacular. People kept asking him ques-

tions. In the Dealers' Room, Marty Massoglia said we'd have done better to send dealers a classics list rather than rely on the Progress Report; fans came before and after

Leadership is the power to persuade others to do what they ought to do without having to be persuaded.

*Harry Truman*

discussion seeking and sometimes couldn't find. Tor had won Best Publisher in the *Locus* Awards. Over drinks Tom Doherty promised a copy of the new Forge edition of U.S. Grant's memoirs, just the Civil War part so as to be one volume. "I like to get out of New York," Doherty said; "if I stayed I'd be fixed in stone."

Kathy Sanders directed the Masquerade, Rick Foss was Master of Ceremonies, I judged with Scott Norton and Bjo Trimble, Casey Bernay backstage as Workmanship Judge. Sanders as in the 1999 NASFiC stationed me at the back of the hall; I wish we'd establish that one judge goes there. M. Edgecomb, whose '94 Westercon Best in Show "Morrigan" I will never forget, won Best in Show this year as "Klingon Mother of Creation." Morgenstern was Best Master as "Madam Dee Vee Dia," her costume made of -- I needn't explain. Theresa MacWillie's "Wood Spirit" was Most Beautiful Journeyman. Calvin Cotton's "Drow" from *Forgot-*

Held up to laughter or glory, whichever men had to give.

*Lord Dunsany*

*ten Realms* took Best Journeyman and Best Workmanship in Show, a white wig stark against his own deep black, the posture and bearing of a deadly magic creature, which many more try than do.

There were no Novice entries. That was also the half missing from the con attendance. A few weeks earlier, looking for fliers suitable for people who didn't already know all about it, I couldn't find any, nor who was in charge of them. With fire and sword I descended on Cantor, commandeering his computer and an Alan White drawing. I ran around town putting up fliers. With phone books and directories I mailed three hundred packets to bookshops and colleges and libraries. Did it help? Too late? Who can be sure? But we can't omit such things.

Saturday night after the Masquerade in the Fanzine Lounge, generous food and good company. Stevens had set out dozens of historical or hysterical fanzines, many with Bruce Pelz. The Phoenix for '04 party gave a

cordial reception. San Jose and Calgary were bidding for '05; San Diego opened a bid for '06. Hospitality chief Christian McGuire -- dare I say animalistically? -- made the Hospitality Suite at the top of the hotel a pleasing resort, brilliant at night. Filking chief Lee Gold found a way to re-key the filk room, saving hours of moving equipment. In addition to concerts and open singing she had themes, a Pelz memorial naturally with his

What we have in common with the gods — benevolence and truth.

*Longinus*

songs, Songs of America, Songs of Revolution, Songs of Larry Niven, Pizza & Ose (as in "morose"). Imagine Niven and Leslie Fish singing "Wanted Fan" from *Fallen Angels*. Gold said "All you have to do is grow up in fandom, see what was done, and see whether it applies."

Before the con when Glycer put me on *The Glass Bead Game* I thought to help find panelists. Against "The Popularity of Alternative History" and "The Bar's My Destination" there were conflicts. Greg Benford, who I hoped might've read it in German, was distracted with other affairs. Ellison? Len Wein encouraged me. I phoned. "Don't even start with me," Ellison said. "I've been asked to do every kind of panel, and I've done every kind of panel, and I don't want to do any more just now." What about *The Glass Bead Game*, I asked. He stopped. "You're right," he said. "No one has ever asked me to sit on a panel about *The Glass Bead Game*." Until the end of the century it was the only Nobel Prize s-f novel, and it might be Hesse's greatest. Alas, Ellison still couldn't do it. I phoned Wein to report. "You know," I said, "I got the distinct notion he felt he wasn't worthy." Ulrika O'Brien and I had to do

Sweet-mouthed, but not as one who can speak nought but sweetness.

*E. R. Eddison*

without him. Widner and Geri Howard came by. E.B. Frohvet thinks *Game* isn't s-f, but although I was half joking when I said the book *Lord of the Rings* was, treating manufacture of a device and its consequences, about *Game* I mean it. Poetic even in translation, superb at character study, it handles what-if wonderfully in its future world, and for *lagniappe* brings a fine unreliable narrator and hints hard questions. From the audience: is there such a thing as decadent art? I said, maybe but watch out for that narrator. Widner hit me for an article (see *YHOS* 59).

Of course I went to hear Mel Gilden and Mark Olson on *The City and the Stars*. Here was scope. Gilden said, it's so interesting while people are only floating along. Kare in the audience said, the ultimate sense-of-wonder book. Olson said, a novel of discovery. From the audience: revelation. Olson said, Clarke suggests the numinous in a way no one else does. Where is the superman-nature of the people in Diaspar? I compared Niven's *Protector*, but Diaspar was made by and for people who wouldn't be supermen. We fell to discussing literary quality.

Next in the room was *Frankenstein*, for which I stayed to moderate Murphy and Young. Murphy said Godwin, Polidori, and Shelley held their own mini-con in the Alps. Young said *Frankenstein* was a classic because you could look at it from many views. Is it a book about how aristocrats treat a

Not only uncharitable, but false.

*Christopher Hibbert*

lower class? Why didn't *Frankenstein* make a woman monster who was sterile? I suggested the book was a satire and the story an irresponsibility contest. Paula Salo in the audience recalled the subtitle *Modern Prometheus*. Murphy said the frame-narrative helped to orient, especially for the many mundane readers. Widner in the audience called the book a master myth of the 19th and 20th Centuries. In remakes, in television commercials, it keeps recurring. It suffers from being, as Nabokov said of *Don Quixote* and is certainly true of his own *Lolita*, one of those books everyone talks about but no one has read. I went off-site to dinner with Jane & Scott Dennis. When we came back we could find no Dead Dog party.



**The 8 of Pentacles** was Kurt Erichsen's contribution to Bruce Pelz' *Fan Tarot Deck*.