

John Hertz's Westercon Notebook

Westercon LVIII "Due North", July 1-4, 2005

Westin Hotel, Calgary, Alberta

Author Guest of Honor S.M. Stirling; Illustrator, Mark Ferrari; Editors-Publishers, Tom Doherty, Dave Hartwell; Fans, Eileen Capes & Cliff Samuels; Science, Phil Currie; Canada, Dave Duncan.

Attendance about 700. In the Art Show 28 artists, sales of about 220 pieces for C\$9,000 (Canadian dollars; of this C\$1,900 in the Print Shop). Westercon XLIX in 1996 at El Paso was our eastmost, Honolulu in 2000 our westmost (and south); Calgary our farthest north. We were almost double the size of local Con-Version.

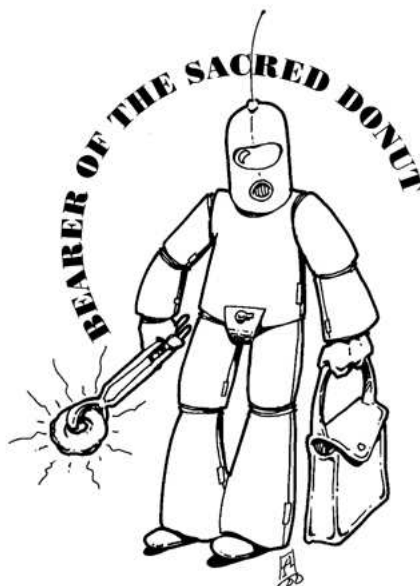
Art Show chief Rayah Deines helped me mount the Selina Phanara sun calendar project. With power tools we drove screws through Deines' cloth-covered plywood display boards to hang clips on. Phanara has been making fanciful suns, in colored paper mostly; some will be a calendar, with votes wanted for which sun looks like which month, a project of Phanara fans Elizabeth Klein-Lebbink and Jerome Scott. Last year I brought some originals to Phoenix, this year a color chart of the whole set, with stick-on

A rambling but accurate and cogent conversationalist.

William K. Wimsatt, Jr.

stars for votes. Phanara is herself original. Later I brought another of the charts to CascadiaCon, the NASFiC, in Seattle. At Due North the ratio of stuck stars to attendance was creditably high.

On Friday afternoon I gave the Kelly Freas memorial slide show. He won eleven Hugos, three Chesleys, and our hearts. His widow Laura and I had spent two days compiling a one-hour retrospective, some images everyone had to see, the giant robot and crumpled man of "The Gulf Between", the little green man now on the banner of the Judith Merrill Library (Toronto), some less known, an *Ellery Queen's* cover, a Western cover, *The End of Eternity*. Kelly was a master of focus, of marshaling detail, of salting the serious with humor – or vice versa – and of *The greater the reality, the better the fantasy*. From the audience: he gave women wonderful hair, men strange hats. The slide show would later be hosted at Interaction ('05 Worldcon, Glasgow) by Joe Siclari, Frank Wu, and Jane Frank, then at



CascadiaCon again by me. This involved handing off the slides in each direction to Kevin Standlee, a trusty courier.

My docent tour of the Art Show was at 4. I didn't invent these, but I've been arranging them where I can. We borrow *docent* from the museum world, where it means someone good at leading people round pointing out things worth looking at. Our docents take one another's tours. I can't tell if I learn more by taking the tours or giving them. Expertise can help, but the hub of the wheel is *Seek to say what you see*. Talking about art is itself an art. Derek Mah's "Dracula" (which won Best Monochrome) wore a 16th

That is the way pity works. You had seen the bull and you had not seen the sheep.

Mencius

Century high collar, ruffs, a sly expression. In "Pacific Rim", an acrylic by Stephanie Ann Johanson of *Neo-Opis*, a pale pool and light drew the eye to an off-center rock in a black cove. In Theo Nelson's watercolor cartoon science series, lollipop trees stood under tiny clouds; I wished this would illustrate R.A. Lafferty. Mah gave a tour himself, as did Ctein, and Deines' 18-year-old daughter, who was exhibiting, Lyra Logan. Logan stood outside the Art Show in a

witch's hat that bore a legend *Docent Tour Here*. When time came for her tour she realized she should keep it on.

Space Cadet was first of the weekend's S-F Classics, done as discussions under solo moderator, as at Phoenix; sometimes they're panels. I don't think prediction matters, but Matt Dodson's taking a mobile phone from his duffel bag must have been astounding in 1948. Barbara Dannenfelser said she'd liked *Cadet* as a girl; I asked, how does it seem now? Another: as we grow annoyed with Stinky Burke we realize Tex Jarman too was rich, what a difference. Another: Matt's mom and dad show why he left home for the Patrol. Another: by the time Burke says it's all a fake, we've already seen the One Bean test that shows what the Patrol thinks of honesty. Another: on Venus the women are in charge. In *Cadet* and Heinlein's "juveniles" generally his elegance is remarkable.

In the lobby was Fran Skene, whom I long hadn't seen in person. By now we had both been Fan GoH at a Phoenix Westercon. Jane & Scott Dennis told me they kept hearing "This is the first con I've attended in years." Co-Chair Randy McCharles told me he kept talking with first-timers. I put on the English Regency clothes and taught dancing, crowded with people I'd never seen

Scope for imagination.

Anne Shirley

before. In the Hospitality Suite, over maple walnut ice cream, Ctein like everyone was remembering Kelly Freas. He was, Ctein said, a gentleman, in the best sense, coupled with full respect for Laura as a person; when Kelly found she could draw, he probably handed her a brush and said "Will you paint the top? I'm sort of busy down here."

Daylight Saturday. As I walked two blocks to the nearest photocopy shop, here came McCharles on his way back, arms laden. Dale Speirs won an Aurora for *Opuntia*. Kent Bloom chaired the Business Meeting, Sandra Childress acting secretary. We ratified the Bylaws amendment changing site-eligibility zones from North and South to North, South, and Central. A dodo arrived. He was a Folkmanis hand & arm puppet I'd agreed to animate as an advertise-

ment for this year's Capclave (Washington, DC), where Howard Waldrop and Teresa & Patrick Nielsen Hayden were GoH. I named him Izzard for Teresa & Patrick's fanzine. For the rest of the weekend he was like a part of me. I certainly was part of him. Geri Sullivan reached the con ten minutes before her docent tour. She put down her luggage and we followed her in. Mike Willmoth made shadow pictures on people's backs when we stood before a side light. Ctein said labeling a piece "digital" didn't say all we needed; what's it made of, for purposes of preservation and display?

With no Fanzine Lounge, I held a Current Fanzines *Kaffeeklatsch*. I'd put round the con a flier with color-photocopy reductions of a dozen visually interesting covers, *Banana Wings* 22, *Chunga* 10, *File 770* 144, *Plokta* 10/1, *Probe* 126, *Tortoise* 20. The con sent coffee and tea. I set out butter-

A frolic took us.

Samuel Pepys

waffle biscuits and Carr's Ginger Creams, and spread three dozen recent issues over a couple of tables. We discussed the place of paper. I said, neither the telephone nor E-mail and the Web superseded it, any medium (as Marshall McLuhan might say) has a place for what it does best. Speirs said paper was durable. I said it was portable. Skene agreed crudzining seemed to have fled to the Internet. I commended Guy Lillian's reviews in *The Zine Dump*. People picked up things and made notes.

Dinner, the *Locus* Awards. Charlie Brown began, "Thank you for inviting me to this literary conference in China," with several more false starts. Doherty said "Thanks to all the authors, first comes the book." Ellen Datlow sent a message "Short fiction is the lifeblood of s-f." There was a Hawaiian Shirt contest. I had judged the one at Conolulu. Brown said "This isn't a Hawaiian shirt, it's an Australian shirt," indeed bearing a map of Australia. Hartwell drew more applause for his tie. Brown pulled up Samuels for his paisley vest. John Varley was the only pro among other finalists Steve Forty, Samuels, and Standlee. Forty wore a shirt he got at Conolulu. Standlee danced. Varley got first prize, a banana autographed by Brown. From the audience, "Brilliance is the most important thing." Connie Willis said "I can't believe you all liked Charlie's Chihuahua joke." Arthur Taylor said "No, we're Canadians, we were just nice to him." Dark gingerbread in the Hospitality Suite. A peach-cider fountain at the CascadiaCon party. James Daugherty explained digitally-filtered photos for his new HP printer that

could do five blacks. Filksinging at 3 a.m., Sue Koziel on flute, the Loch Tay boat song. And so to bed.

The making of these mistakes is part of the price paid by those who reject the homely, avoid the obvious, and look about for the imposing.

Fowler

At 11 a.m. on Sunday was Ferrari's docent tour. When the con opened his work was stuck in Customs. He showed color images on a lapsize computer. Now all was well. Artists had work-in-progress tables along the walls. Aurora-winning Tim Hammell showed his collection *The Inner Mind* next to a print of the cover picture from his portfolio, under broken blue spheres in a serpentine gulf a small man in a skiff. We could see how the cover used more-saturated colors. Dan O'Driscoll had hung his "Starship *Athene*" (Best S-F) next to his streamlined atmospheric ship for the February 2004 *Asimov's*. Ferrari pointed to the darkest spots all next to the brightest spots, the exhaust and the highlights at the nose. "I'm really interested in color and light," he said; "I'm a terrible draftsman." San Jose won Westercon LX unopposed.

A *Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. I had called it an s-f classic; I asked people if they thought it was s-f, and why. Hank Morgan the Yankee introduces technology, they said, and indeed we're shown its effects. I asked, should we rename our maxim Mark Twain's Law? No: he didn't formulate it; he applied it, but Clarke said "Sufficiently advanced technology can be indistinguishable from magic." How carefully Twain painted all the bigotry for purposes of his art! He knew the inventions would have to go away. So they were brought by Morgan, who never comprehended the Church or the aristocracy, to him only clowns and goons; he won followers but lacked friends; Twain set this up to bring

The most precise and flexible in the world.

Stravinsky

Morgan down, solving time-travel with tragedy. Twain's endless, matchless joking was at home in a heart big enough for it, for compassion, and for a craftsman's love. He wrote about writing. *Use the right word*, he said, *not its cousin*.

In the halls, a harlequin and an Imperial TIE-fighter pilot. A local graphic artist,

who'd been showing his portfolio to visiting publishers, chatted about commerce. It seems, he said, to try selling a book to people who already like that kind of thing. Isn't that the low end, I asked, selling the already-sold? Isn't the high end showing us what's interesting about something we hadn't thought to be interested in? Two Boston fans who'd been in the *Yankee* discussion further explored early s-f classics. I favored *Frankenstein* for first, Verne for founder. Yet they, and Huxley the poet, Wells the preacher, didn't ignite the rocket to take off. We seem with Gernsback - knowingly or not on Verne's foundation - to have started an art of possibility, which is science, and hope as well as warning. In the Hospitality Suite, Roger Wells liked how I'd said in *Vanamonde* that, at what our crowd calls an s-f con, we don't offer tickets to gawk.

Donna McMahon led the discussion of *Slan*. It has action, she said. It has drama and a series of bold strokes. McMahon said *Slan* showed superior intelligence requiring empathy. Tom Veal wondered how much it met with resistance to the theory of evolution. Tom Craig asked, do all books have to have a deep philosophical meaning? I had wondered about the tendrillless-slant empire, and about their character, as the author meant me to, one of the great stunts under Poe's "Purloined Letter". Re-reading can be important. McMahon criticized didactic speeches in the second half of the book, but

It would be wise to be skeptical even of skepticism.

Clarke

in fact they are revelatory of the speakers. No less a stylist than Harlan Ellison has written that Van Vogt was a giant, the well-spring of wonder. His dazzling power of invention is not his only literary virtue.

I went to hear "Evolution of the S-F Con", Bobbie DuFault, Jason Sallay of Con-Version, Standlee. Standlee said Baycon and *Animé-Con* both grew. DuFault said we should on the one hand look for commonality, and on the other hand promote the sharing of subfandoms. "I'm bringing Steve Forty's Gestetner machines to CascadiaCon," she said, "to support a part of fandom I don't even participate in." She stayed for the next hour to take NASFiC questions. Sallay had talked of pursuing one's passion. What, I asked him, about things one simply finds amusing? He said Calgary had felt hard economic realities. No doubt this was true. But as an amateur teacher I had learned the old rule *A well-taught class fills, a badly-taught class empties*. He said Con-

Version was formed to be literary.

The Masquerade Director, Sandra Manning, had done wonders from Alaska and on-site. Master of Ceremonies was the Wombat; Workmanship Judge backstage (workmanship judging is optional for entrants), Andy Trembley; judges, Capes, Kevin Roche, and me. Best Novice was "Entrance of the Emperor" (Duncan Carmichael) from *Warhammer 40,000*; also Best Workmanship in Class, his work almost entirely in cardboard. Most Beautiful, Journeyman, and Best Workmanship in Show, was "Ocean Dragon" (Dana Teh), blue and green fabric, painted fabric, leather, tattoos, details down to beading and edge treatment. Jenn Sykes and Rob McDowell won Best Journeyman for "Defenders of the Republic" from *Star Wars*, poised, dramatic, clear even to me who had not seen this episode. Raj Bhardawaj, Katherine Bonham, Jennifer Gerritsen, Elizabeth Jepson, Kent McKay,

The suppressed flurry of fantastic clothing.

Barbara Hambly

and Michael Schmidt closed the show with a terrifying sports team, "Your Mordor Orcs" (Master), which we adjudged Best Act of Getting Away with Mordor, carefully respelled, alas, by the newsletter.

Con-Version is in mid-August. To get into the act the gang scheduled Con-Version 21.5 at Due North, renaming "Crown Suite" to "Clown Suite". I had seen little of them, so went up to their penthouse, where I found them going great guns. There was a Robo Rally tournament, a board game which in my part of the world takes Jordan Brown to

understand. (Migly, leave this in, I want to see the letters.) I thought perhaps these folks were hiding their light under a bushel until Sallay, and Derek France, explained the

For we are all, one with another,
wise and foolish, like a ring which
has no end.

Shōtoku.

Clown Suite was really a separate convention, from which, as the weekend wore on, more and more locals had also gotten Westercon memberships. I spoke with them about participation and cross-fertilization.

Mid-morning in the Hospitality Suite. Friday was the holiday in Canada, Monday in the U.S. Some of us managed to get away for both. I drank Rock Creek cider. John Dalmas said "We're born to learn." Brian Davis had won CUFF (Canadian Unity Fan Fund). In the halls I gave Bruce Taylor a hall-costume award for his ice-cream suit. Now and then people asked about the dodo. When they saw Waldrop's name on the Capclave flier they sometimes understood. On the slate of Hugo-nominee reviews I gave the one for Best Pro Artist. The con committee had kindly rounded up two dozen images of each nominee's work and mounted them in a computer for me to project on a big screen. Jim Beveridge in the audience noted the Kelly Freas influence everywhere. I've called Eggleton the J.M.W. Turner of s-f, a student of fire and light. Giancola carried the torch of realism, perhaps Burns of surrealism. John Picacio, the new boy on the block, knew a world of dreams, nebulous and strange.

At Closing Ceremonies the GoH wore

white cowboy hats, as they had through the weekend, in honor of the Calgary Stampede coming next and because they were good guys. I don't mean Stirling wore one; he was elsewhere anyway. Had the ceremony been perfect the world might have come to an end. Ferrari was pleased with how well the Program Book reproduced his colors, which were difficult. He was able to say this in the presence of Hartwell, who was dressed as usual. A little while helping take down the Art Show. Bobbi Gear's motto had been "I always demand too much of my students, it's the least I can do"; maybe some rubbed off, Con-Version came to ask me if I'd be their Fan GoH next year.

Dinner in the Calgary Tower, a hundred meters up, with Jean Goddin & Willmoth. We looked down through glass panels, stood on glass panels, and ate beef, buffalo, and elk in the revolving restaurant. At the Dead Dog party Rick Weiss, Standlee, and I pursued the fate of general-interest and special-interest cons. General cons once promoted "Indulge your special interest with us." As fandom grew, special cons arose, which could do more for any special interest. Cross-fertilization was what general cons really had to offer, indeed the meeting of people not just like oneself. This might be the fundamental note of s-f, as Larry Niven puts it *There are minds as good as yours but different*.

