

John Hertz's Westercon Notebook

Westercon 54, July 5-8, 2001

Jantzen Beach and Columbia River Hotels, Portland, Oregon

The first Westercon of the Millennium. Writer Guest of Honor, Tim Powers; Fan GoH, Mike Glycer; Editor GoH, Terri Windling; Artist GoH, Frank Lurz. Attendance about 1,600. Chair, Dean Koenig.

For 1984 when the Fourth of July was a Wednesday there were bids proposing the weekend before, the weekend after, and both (some called that a hoax); Portland won, and Wednesday Westercons have been here ever since. This was our third at the present site, two hotels split by a big parking lot like the djinn sacrament in Powers' dazzling new book *Declare*. Fireworks across the river at old Fort Vancouver, nationally recognized, were dazzling too. Michelle and Harry Howard talked me into coming up a night early to see them. The fireworks. Glass walls on the riverbank in the bar, gosh. Dozens of articulate fans said Ooh and Aah. We did remember Gandalf's in *The Lord of the Rings* and even *Rally Round the Flag, Boys* -- anyway, I remembered the book.

As the barmaids were shooing people out Art Widner found us. He and I were rooming with Fred Patten, who I feared was asleep, so we four found a happy spot in the lobby. Widner came back with a bottle of whisky, a handful of glasses, and Patten in pajamas. Mike Willmoth came along after a while. Widner said *The Lord of the Rings* set the Quest on its head with a hero who threw away the token and its power. Patten, who chaired a Westercon, helped invent the Down Under Fan Fund (DUFF), and is no slouch as a fanhis-

This craving for incertitude, this clinging to fear, as if incertitude and fear had been the safeguards of love.

Joseph Conrad

torian, now had *animé* at his fingers' ends. Willmoth said I was wrong about *Babylon 5*: in fact it was hopeful. M. Howard said it resonated with her as a Christian. H. Howard said *A Canticle for Leibowitz* was despondent. I said, ambiguous. M. Howard said fantasy, not an idiom of courageous heroes, appeals to women.

Widner said, why?

I remembered him sitting on the floor in 1990 while he was Fan GoH at this con, asking why with technology bringing us to the future s-f dove into the past. No better now. "Dark and dank for the most part, drab where it should be colorful and unimaginative where it needs to be transcendent", as Jeff VanderMeer has written in another context. We talked up and down until 3 or 4. Science fiction has lost its nerve, said Widner. I go away for a few decades, and when I come back where are we? It was his convention.

Thursday morn I gave a largish bath towel to a charitable collection in memory of Douglas Adams. Though Tom Doherty never received my first copy of Nabokov's *Lectures on Literature*, the second arrived. I drank espresso and ate a walnut cookie. Crossing the parking lot, not for the first nor yet the second time, I found a beautiful day.

You right me much.

Elizabeth I

At 1, alone, I gave "How to Enjoy the Art Show, How to Enjoy the Tours." The audience helped form some advice: look for good

things you don't like, it broadens the mind; go with a friend. At 4 came the Pocket Program. Cheers. There was a panelist cross-index, but no grid. The Program Book had participant biographies, "department reports," an eleven-page excerpt from *Declare* and eight Lurz color astronomicals, an unsigned appreciation of Peggy Kennedy (1929-2000) and a black-and-white portfolio of Gail Butler, Alan Clark, Fiona McAuliffe, Nene Thomas, and James Wappel, but nothing that explained this was a science fiction convention. I suppose no one can explain it.

Andi Shechter introduced me to Murray the Gorilla who wore a propeller beanie. Kevin Standlee punctiliously gave me a paper copy of *Emerald City*. I snuck late into the audience of "Westercons Past, Present, and Future," Bruce Pelz, Willmoth, Ben Yalow; later Steve Forty appeared and was seized for the panel. Both his home and the location of his chair made him the North Forty. We talked of attendance. Kent Bloom in the audience said to Pelz, chair of the 2002 Westercon, "You have the biggest fan base in the country." Pelz said "I'm going on a diet." I said we have to publicize better. Pelz said Westercon is an aggregation, not a splitting.

Here I believe is the merit of conventions like this in our day of comics cons, filk cons, fanzine cons, costume cons. Let us freely separate, freely unite, neither of the two distracting us.

Opening Ceremonies at 7:30, well attended. Through time and space with computer jokes. Glycer whom no one introduced, cast as various pirates and cave men, kept promising to pub his ish. In the Hospitality Suite, Forty wondered what to say on "*Stranger in a Strange Land* after Forty Years." Forbearing the obvious explanation of why he was on the panel, I begged him to forget whether predictions were right, or what he thought of religion, in favor of how *Stranger* looked as literature. At the Seattle for 2003 Westercon party I drank Beaulieu Vineyards claret and watched Sally Woehrle bake bread. Lynn Ann Gold said Lee Gold was better at scansion than anyone. On Chip Hitchcock's T-shirt "The Weapon Shops of Escher" the gun



was a 3-prong pouyit.

Friday at 11:30 a.m. "Paper Fanzines: We Love the Smell of Hecto in the Morning," with Glycer, Jerry Kaufman, and Patten, plus

This is not a tale exactly. This is a Tract; and I am immensely proud of it. Making a Tract is a Feat.

Kipling

Lenny Bailes whom we seized. We never got to what about paper fanzines would sustain an ecological niche for them, but we did talk about taking in less of our own laundry. Kaufman said cons depend on guest lists made of pros. Bailes said, so let's us fanziners volunteer. I said maybe we could encourage fanartists to exhibit more in Art Shows. Suzle in the audience wondered if Jay Kay Klein would do a slide show. His photos had enlivened the Hugo Awards ceremony at the 1993 Worldcon, "ConFrancisco." We applauded Westercon 55's choosing Robert Lichtman of *Trap Door* as Fan GoH. Rachel Holmen in the audience said he brought her into fandom. She asked everyone for a list of noteworthy fanzines, and wrote it up, by Roscoe, in the daily newswire.

Glycer was to interview Powers, but lest Powers close the circuit by interviewing Glycer, which might have had unimaginable consequences and brought an end to the world as we know it, I interviewed him. Powers has this effect on people. Naturally he moved into a house where someone had carefully alternated pennies heads and tails every foot along thin wood strips, with air-conditioners buried in the back yard. Glycer's first contact was an s-f discussion group at the public library of Sylmar, California. He started *Prehensile*, I still think one of the best fanzine titles, so as to hand it out and get to know people. When Linda Bushyager quit publishing the leading 1970s newswire *Karass*, he thought "why not?" He was in several amateur publishing associations, and knew people like Craig Miller who in promoting s-f films kept going to cons. He said, and this was striking, that from the start of

The poor suppose that courtesy is giving presents; the aged, that it is expending energy.

Kenkō

File 770 he wanted to bridge the insiders and the new. He advertised in *Locus*. He wanted to range widely over fandom. He is, I believe, all too unusual as a leading fanwriter, who while maintaining his own zine, co-chaired a Westercon, chaired a Worldcon, and stayed active in his local club.

"I love big Worldcons," Glycer said, "it's like going to a penny-candy store with lots of pennies." Good thing Powers didn't do this. "In the chair [of L.A. con III, 1996], I couldn't do everything [like Don Lundry], but I had a crew of strong division heads." In the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society, where during the lacktivity and now after the passing of Jack Harness, Glycer has been the outstanding Secretary, he always declined "Scribe" as meaning Harness only, who coined *The Menace of the LASFS*, and whom Glycer acknowledged as an example. "When I was Fan Guest of Honor at DeepSouthCon," he said, "people told me my LASFS minutes [published in the club zine *De Profundis*] were funny. They thought I was making it all up myself." This as I have proposed elsewhere was like Van Gogh saying of *Starry Night* "I only paint what I see." Robin Johnson in the audience said, "You're a catalyst. You make funny things happen around you." David Bratman said funny reporting was an art, and *File 770* prints all the news that's funny. I recalled the scene in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* when the detective Eddie Valiant asks "Do you mean to tell me you

An appetite for happiness.

Maupassant

could at any time have shrunk your wrist and gotten it out of those handcuffs?" and Roger Rabbit says "Only if it would have been funny." Diana Glycer cried "Do you mean to tell me my husband is a Toon?" I said "No, he's only drawn that way."

The Art Show had about 1,700 pieces from 100 artists, sales \$16,000. Corey Wolfe (whose body of work won People's Choice as Best in Show) exhibited his original and the cover made from it for Paul Thompson's *Children of the Plains*. Geri Sullivan on her docent tour pointed out the color compromises that had to be made in printing. Clark (who won Best Horror for "The Sly Pass", and People's Choice as Best Application of Media) had set up a work space and let us watch him laboring away. A woman went by in a Judith Rauchfuss mask with purple horns and gold tips. In the Clubhouse (as before, the other of two Hospitality Suites) Dick Pilz as before brought home-brew, including two versions of his barley wine "Old Propeller Head." I had just time to see William Wilde Zeitler's glass armonica before dressing to teach Regency Dancing. Sure enough he was deep in technical talk with Jon Singer about glass, and soap and water -- it works like ringing a tone from a tumbler rim. I missed the *Locus* Awards again. Tor won Best Publisher, Bob Eggleton won Best Artist, Larry Niven won Best Short Story for "The Missing Mass" (*Analog*). At the U.K. for 2005 Worldcon party Lurz' prowess as a fencer

sparked talk of fencing schools. The repute of the previous U.K. bid for serving good whisky sparked talk of Glenmorangie; Cory Raub had some, matured in barrels that had

Imagination, the muscle of the soul.

Nabokov

been used for Port. And so to bed.

On the table between Powers and Glycer were three huge bottles of Coca-Cola. Powers told of his early travails with Laser Books and then Lester Del Rey. Beth Meacham's cuts in *The Anubis Gates* he thought beneficial; when a small press later offered to restore them, he declined. "In fantasy," he said, "I'm always working against the readers' knowledge that it's bogus. I throw in as much real-world stuff as I can, so when I slide in a ghost, you won't notice -- or you'll think *Gee, that other stuff was real, so...*" *Declare* wasn't so much alternative history as What Got Left Out. In writing he made notes as if he had no memory; later he might see a conclusion was no good, but halfway back the chain was the cool part. Besides, for a story set in 1963 with consecutive flashbacks -- cut and show flashback, cut and show next flashback -- it would be too much to ask the reader to put up with jumbled flashbacks. If you're building a roller coaster, and you have a fall *here*, you have to allow room for cement. He was asked about messages and symbolism. "I don't care whether I teach anything. Some writers say *I have something to say about the human condition.*"

Burning with intelligence and charity.

C.S. Lewis

Well, say it now. *Brush your teeth*. I can't stand that."

At 2:30 Steve Barnes moderated "The Future That Wasn't", with James Gifford, me, Ken Wharton, Lori Ann White, and Willmoth, who was glad we didn't get Heinlein's "Roads Must Roll." I urged that s-f wasn't in the prediction business. Wharton said we did have a space station. From the audience, "The only part of the *Foundation* series I couldn't believe was that everyone would have a computer." I said both selfishness and openmindedness have come out different; we're more cross-cultural, but the Moon was "What's in it for me" instead of "Wow, adventure." Barnes said cheaper information was life-changing. White said Have and Have-Not grow more like understanding than like property. I said education may yet come to be learning to evaluate. Walter Parker in the audience said, cheap fast travel. Photocopiers, supermarkets, contact lenses, survival of infants. I said *innovation*,

Westercon 54 Masquerade

Janet Borkowski, *Director*
David Bigelow, *Master of Ceremonies*

Judges

Betty Bigelow
Jan Howard Finder
Deborah Strub

Workmanship Judges

Louise Owens
David Tackett

Best Rising Star

"Butterfly Princess" (Tony Mae Forbis, costume by Holly Forbis)

Novice

Best in Class

"Sasami, Japanese Schoolgirl"
(Alicia & April Faires)

Workmanship:

Best, "Thora Ulfsdottir" (Stacy DeLoe);

Judges' Choice, "Sasami"

Journeyman

Best in Class

"Spawn and Violator" (Todd Smith, Emily & Regina Ryan)

Judges' Choice

"Ice Pirates of Penzance"
(Michael Bruno)

Workmanship:

"Spawn"

Master

Best in Class

"Babylon Five-O" (A.C.R.O.N.Y.M.)

Judges' Choice

"Oogie Boogie"

(Julie Hoverson);

"Aquatika"

(Orchid Cabot, Shannon Flint)

Workmanship: "Aquatika"

Best in Show

"Generation Gap"

(SueLyn Torgerson-Taylor,
Christopher Taylor)

Best Workmanship

"Scots Bride & Groom"

(Stephanie Fisher, John Fisher)

the spirit of s-f, once was an insult. Willmoth said there's no Moon base. From the audience, no flying belts. Barnes said the way most people drive he didn't want to see people fly. Gifford said, before the atomic bomb no weapon was ever built and unused. It was good to have hour-long panels scheduled at hour and a half intervals.

The hotel registration staff by now wore the snazzy Westercon T-shirt, with a Lurz space ship (but not "science fiction convention"), the doing of Melanie Schaber and Patty Wells. In the bar Becky Thomson and

The worse you express yourself these days the more profound people think you.

Honorio Denver

Tom Veal looked hale and even proposed we throw another Prime Time party at Loscon, to start at 1 a.m. and run till dawn. Just now they struggled to arrange exhibits for the Millennium Philcon. Kimberly Brown, at the con bidding and membership tables, wondered why the tables weren't in the other hotel, where they could have been outside the Art Show and Dealers' Room. Janice Murray ran the Fanzine Lounge, cozy with fanzines and talk space and a coldbox of soft drinks. I fetched ice. Both hotels had signposts with pointing fingers -- at this con it was hard not to point fingers -- which were more or less accurate; fanziners found their way, but I wondered what others knew where or that we were. There was no description in the Program Book.

At 5:30 I sat on "Ben Franklin, Futurist of the Past, Father of his Country" with Louise Marley, G. David Nordley, Irene Radford. We were armed with the *Autobiography* (despite Mark Twain) and various other references. Just outlining his achievements took a while: the first circulating library in Amer-

It is only the very wisest and the very stupidest who cannot change.

Confucius

ica, the first fire company in Philadelphia, the first person to prove lightning was electricity; the lightning rod, the stove, bifocals, glass armonica, British and French Academies, diplomatic triumph in France. He published an essay there on religious tolerance, contriving to make it unobjectionable and even attractive. Nordley said he was one of the first to earn a living writing; predicted balloons would add a third dimension to war, imagining paratroopers (ill-formed word that); wrote an s-f story of a white enslaved in Africa. I said he was remarkably able at both

trying and applying science. A.J. Budrys in the audience said Franklin in his kite experiment was lucky to get out alive. Another: he wrote simply, but he was the one who had to set the type!

In the Art Show reception Lurz told me about his docent tour and answered some questions about fencing. In the Masquerade, "Babylon Five-O" (Best Master) was a welcome reprise from last year at Honolulu, bending the rules but right. Kosh seemed even bigger than when I'd judged this entry myself. I didn't recognize some of the *animé*-television-comics entries, but the audience roared, and the judges I hope had documentation. Michael Bruno ("Ice Pirates of Penzance"; Judges' Choice, Journeyman) lip-synched every word of "The Modern Major-General," fiendish task. Julie Hoverson ("Oogie Boogie"; Judges' Choice, Master)

You've got to be above all those calling you names, and you've got to do more work than they do, but it usually comes out all right in the end.

Harry Truman

made what I innocently thought was a barrel dance. "Aquatika," at first called "Sea Creatures" (Judges' Choice, Master), danced before a high spray of glowing lights. "Generation Gap" was one of the best transformations I've seen: a lady in a ball gown warned an unruly child; an instant's blackout; *exeunt*, down the ramp into the audience, one lady and one well-behaved marionette, its strings in her hands (Best in Show).

At Masquerade intermission Jack Krolak told me about "Take It Apart", which brought together old machines good only for scrap, tools, and kids. The kids were told (1) how to sort parts, and (2) "Have at it!" They went, he said, like gremlins. At the Seattle party a local magician, "Matt the Maverick" Burton in his Riverboat Gambler suit, did card tricks. This too was dazzling. We talked of the show-your-skill school of John Scarne, the why-dispel-the-illusion-by-pointing-it-out school of Robert-Houdin. In the halls I saw two purple people, who sure looked strange to me. Team Maroon in their maroon togas, not much worse for wear, offered Toxic Waste to anyone who dared drink it, and sold post-supporting memberships in Spokane Westercon. My attempt to help (why do you *think* they're trying to sell post-supporting memberships?) by auctioning a *Star Trek* toy left Sandy Cohen unrivaled.

Around midnight, in the Adventure of the Ten Shortbread Fingers (or, the Bemis-Parker Plans), for which the world is not yet prepared, I found myself waiting for Pelz in his room while he waited for the last bus Between Planets. It never came; finally he

Truth is of such excellence that if it praised trifles it would make them noble.

Leonard da Vinci

got a ride. In good cheer I read a 1974 *Prehensile* he had on a table. I'm sure I have this, eventually I told him. Yes, he said, but can you find it? At the Loscon party Chaz Baden pursuing his Science Fair theme brought an exhibit warning against dihydrogen monoxide. DHMO has been associated with burns, and found in high quantities in registered intoxicants. It has been shown present at every death since studies began. Experiments were described, and contrary arguments for its safety were given due space. Going to hear filkers at 4 a.m. I was just in time for Jordin Kare: "There are some songs Man was not meant to sing. And this is one of them," which was, of course, the end.

My own Art Show docent tour was on Sunday. "The Tower" by McAuliffe solidified vague heads and faces rising blackly from a tangled mass, the sky bleak swirls. Matt Harpod's large pieces, although flat, seemed made of stone (Best Science Fiction for "Clock Dragon"; Grand Prize for "Automation"). Borkowski the Masquerade Director brought beadwork. Jeff Sturgeon brought his glittering expanses of metal (People's Choice as Most Awe-Inspiring). Rob Alexander brought watercolors. "The Elf King's Hall" showed a dark door up twelve barren steps, barely carved walls; what kind of king? This won Best Fantasy. Mark Ferrari the colored-pencil wizard won People's Choice as Best Fantasy Artist (Lurz won People's Choice as Best Science-Fictional Artist), and a Director's Choice for "Dragonfly" which led the eye with almost shocking blues. To balance the fantasy I wanted more science fiction. However fond you are of fruit or fish, if you only feed on one you won't flourish.

Seattle won unopposed for 2003; its Progress Report 0 named Saul Jaffe as Fan GoH, others to be announced. Phoenix is bidding vigorously for 2004. I relieved J. Murray for

Direction is the better part of valor.

T.H. White

a few hours in the Fanzine Lounge. At one historic moment four DUFF winners were present, Janice Gelb (1999), Lucy Huntzinger (1987), Kaufman (1983), and Widner (1991), such was the benign influence of Murray the 1997 winner. Or delegate. A combined auction for DUFF and GUFF (Get Up and Over -- or Going Under -- Fan Fund, between Australia & New Zealand, and Europe) raised about \$200, and Gelb's trip report

Janice's Adventures in Downunderland continues to sell. I saw less of the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund. Stu Shiffman (1981 TAFF delegate) gave me a cartoon for *Vanamonde*. In the lobby Bruce Durochet explained cat curling. Cats fall asleep in a C. You pick up the cat by the curve, and whoosh! I said there was more than one way to spin a cat. Holmen and Margaret Organ-Kean said "Bruce, we have to go now." I overheard a member of the con committee telling a pro writer "We've done better."

At the Dead Dog Party refreshments were

Why out of false shame should I prefer to remain ignorant rather than to learn my craft?

Horace

lavish, Widmer Hefeweizen beer and Guinness, strawberries, cheeses, the last of the 150 lbs. salmon Roz Malin had smoked for the Clubhouse. She does things like this. Forty said Heinlein taught him relativity. I said that only happened because Heinlein made science fact (or theory) the turning point of the story so it came alive. Marilyn Holt and Clifford Wind talked with me about complacency. Are we making the most of what we do best? Are we letting on -- in our own way, never mind "the media" -- so that those who might be fun to play with know we have a sandbox?

Classified Information

We've all read the want ads sometime and had a glamorous job opening catch our

eye. We read just enough to realize we're not qualified, and turn the page. But not long ago, I saw an ad for an executive position that I could actually apply for. After all, I held the position once upon a time.

The Seattle Westercon Organizing Committee ran an ad in *Westwind 257* "looking for the best possible person to chair Westercon 56 in 2003." Do you qualify?

"The Chairman Selection Committee is looking for a person that has experience working with a large convention, is a good people person, is well organized, can work with a technology theme and is willing to give up two years of their life to the Westercon." Oh, is that last part expensive!

Golden Dream

Winners of the Libertarian Futurist Society's Prometheus Award traditionally get a gold coin and a plaque. The idea is to offer something of real value to aid as well as encourage libertarian science fiction writers. But the LFS suddenly realized all the coins they use are produced by governments! So the LFScon business meeting considered having a nongovernment coin minted. But the price is too steep. They were quoted \$750 for the cost of plate, with a minimum order of ten coins. So someone else suggested looking for a gold coin from a defunct government. What a genius plan -- a gold piece bearing the phiz of Vespasian or Alexander the Great would be much more politically correct! [[Source: *Prometheus*, 6/2001]]

