

John Hertz's Westecon Notebook

Westercon LVII "Conkopelli, July 2-5, 2004 The Wigwam Resort, Litchfield Park, Arizona

Author Guest of Honor C.J. Cherryh, Illustrator GoH David Cherry, Fan GoH me, Filker GoH Heather Alexander, Local Author GoH Diana Gabaldon. Cherryh's unhappily taking sick on the road and having to turn back prevented choruses of GoH, GoH Five! (Moshe Feder, is this obscure?) Attendance 800. In the Art Show, 1,200 pieces by 90 artists, sales \$14,000.

The con committee felt it scored by striking a deal with the Wigwam, a Four-Star, Four-Diamond resort made available to us at our kind of prices. In July days the Sonora Desert is hot, but low humidity helped, as did a fleet of golf carts and a luxury-trained staff off-season with no one but us to serve. Night made a pleasant stroll. We lived in little houses spread over

Wherein many things are very good and some frivolous.

Pepys

pathways we got lost in, even veterans of New York's Lunacon at the Klein Bottle Hotel, but party hosts put up signs, and lights, and set chairs and dances on the lawn.

The Wigwam, in its 75th year as a hotel, once mainly a guest ranch, is now famed for golf; two of its courses were designed by Robert Trent Jones. I saw a swell croquet field. Goodyear began enterprise on the site in 1916 when boll weevils ruined Sea Island cotton from Georgia, German submarines thwarted imports from Egypt, and tires needed long staple from somewhere. Of such things is s-f too made. The odd name *Wigwam*, like the mysterious building numbers, was historical. The place was gorgeous. Was it too far from Phoenix to attract new chums?

Soon after I unpacked, a hotel man behind a desk looked at my propeller beanie and asked "How do you earn it?" This question was, I hoped, a good omen. A strong delegation came from the Nippon 2007 Worldcon bid: chairman Inoue Hiroaki, his wife Inoue Tamie, Hachiya Shouichi, Imaoka Masaharu, and Musubuchi Kaku. I brought them Saturn peaches, a little ring-like fruit just in season at Los Angeles where I live, which I gave partly in honor of the Cassini-Huygens space probe just arriving. For a local touch I

I SERIOUSLY DOUBT
THIS FANED'S
SANITY....



wrapped them in cloth from the Wigwam gift shop decorated with images of Kokopelli, the flute-playing dancer-joker of Southwestern myth, after whom the con was named. Later I observed to the concom that it might not have been so wise to invoke him.

In the bar Hachiya and Musubuchi, to be local, drank tequila. Joni Dashoff drank chocolate martinis. She said they were martinis. I wondered about U.S. *saké*; Hachiya said Kentucky and Tennessee had good *saké*

These things coming into my memory as I write this story, it would be unnatural for me to omit them.

Plutarch

climate, but the people there all make whiskey. In my room the concom left a home-filled basket of oranges, Gala apples, lime & salt cashews, bottled water, chocolate-covered espresso beans, madeleines, Lindt balls, and Valhrona jivaro drops. All weekend I had no occasion for the jivaro fingernail pinch. The con had scheduled a handful of Classics of S-F discussions. In the hall, after Opening Ceremonies, Lorraine Tutihasi said *Three Hearts and Three Lions*, which on Monday she was to lead talk of, reminded her of Victor Hugo. Did it explain too much? Before *The Lord of the Rings*, I said, maybe the author (or his editors) felt awkward with fantasy.

The Program Book did list panels and

panelists, which has to be mentioned as an achievement after Noreascon IV. Like too many Program Books it did not say "science fiction convention"; it ran an article about the Hospitality Suite, a schedule of filksinging, but it must have been a maze for anyone who didn't already understand. Mike Glycer wrote me up kindly. Graphics were fuzzy, not just photos but fine drawings by Cherry and paid advertisements, the look of throwing things together by E-mail and the Web inattentive of the medium in which they would appear. Participant bios were uneven, the look of — well, you get the idea. Names on badges were printed, too small, in black on blue. The Progress Reports had been weak, which can put people off and hurt attendance. Here and elsewhere rang Tom Whitmore's best advice, *Con committees worry too much about how things are made, and not enough about how they'll be used.*

Friday. Upon me had more or less descended the Fanzine Lounge. I had brought

With a fatal accuracy of process, a fatal ignorance of things, and no appreciation of the increasing chances of error.

Belloc

toys for the tables, planets and things for the walls, and three or four dozen current zines. Milt Stevens brought historic ones. I left him with the jigsaw puzzle and the platypus. Brett Achorn arrived with a suitcase of Selina Phanara suns for the Art Show. Elizabeth Klein-Lebbink and Jerome Scott, making a calendar of them, had lent two panelsful to display Not For Sale. The Inoues, seeing me labor at sun arrangement, stopped to bear a hand.

That afternoon the Wombat, glorious from his New Zealand tour, gave "What Pippin [another long-time nickname of his] Did on His Summer Vacation", with slides and stories. Viggo Mortensen had made friends eating with stunties, customarily served last; Orlando Bloom had done his own "skateboard" take. I sought Jacqueline Lichtenberg's discussion of *The Caves of Steel*, not knowing I'd lead this myself at the Worldcon in a few months. No sign of her — at what later proved to be the wrong fireplace.

But there was Moira Stern and what she probably thought a small Celtic harp. At my request Cary Swaty, who was recording, tried turning off the amplified sound. Harp and voice better than ever. Stern sang “Completely round is the shining pearl the oyster manufactures; completely round is the steering wheel that leads to complex fractures.”

As at various recent cons I’d arranged docent tours of the Art Show, *docent* borrowed from the museum world, where it means someone good at leading people round pointing out things worth looking at. Here we tried scheduling Cherry in the evening, Friday at 8:30 — alas, while I had to dress for English Regency dancing. Earlier in the day I learned the sound-equipment was fouled in schedule conflicts; chairman Craig Dyer contributed his own; we ran anxious tests; all that seemed well. To the ballroom; aieeee; the hotel had, despite all asking, put in one of

You don’t seem to know what being tired is.

Harriet Vane

those wretched portable dance floors. But it was a luxury hotel. I had only to lift a finger. A swarm of workers came, with power tools, and removed the offense in moments. Janice Gelb wore a new gown. Marty Massoglia danced with Normalene Zeeman, a librarian who’d told me Thursday it was her first con. A blonde wore striped body paint, bare-armed and décolleté, her face a flower.

Half past midnight, the San Diego for ’06 Westercon party. Sandra Childress poured me a Green Dragon. Politely we both did not mention how much I was to blame for the Mah Jongg fad in certain quarters of fandom — Chinese style, I quickly add (see *File 770:142*, page 15). At quarter of two Dashoff and I went to the League of Evil Geniuses party. This called for some strolling over the grounds. I don’t think Westercon used all 450 acres. We arrived at what we felt was a seasonable hour. Lights on, signs up, door locked. I remarked how the book *Fahrenheit 451* showed “good” writing — technical manuals — and bad, while the 1966 Truffaut film took pains to make all writing bad. Dashoff liked the Seven Sisters women’s schools; I told her my mother was a Mills alumna who’d voted not to invite men. We discussed con lore; the reticent learn not, the hot-tempered teach not, as Rabbi Hillel, who was neither, said two millennia ago.

Saturday, “Masquerade Judging” at ten. Explanation of the Novice-Journeyman-Master system, which is based on experience to ease those who may not have much; anyone can “challenge up”. David Tackett reminded people they should feel free to ask questions

of judges afterwards. See Hillel. The Wombat said, when you don’t care to compete try

It being a common plea of wickedness to call temptation destiny.

Johnson

working backstage, it broadens the mind. I who am thought to know words felt free to say *Be visual*. “Stage Presence” at eleven. Alexander said you need almost a split personality of your character and yourself; I said, your character is a puppet, you are the puppeteer. Kevin Roche said, use the whole stage. Nola Yergen-Jennings said, get accustomed to your stage clothes; try them in mundane circumstances. From the audience: suspend disbelief. I said, or create belief.

The Business Meeting finally saw a proposal that could get votes to amend north-south site rotation (By-Laws, Article 3); this passed, and we now have North of the 42nd Parallel; Central; South of San Luis Obispo county, California, and points west; and Other, for Australia, Roscoe help us. It needed a serpentine vote, always dramatic. Ed Green was in the chair, Achorn secretary. At the correct fireplace I began on *Fahrenheit 451* by reading aloud. Is it admirable for its message, or regardless? Tom Veal said the book had the literary quality of showing how people respond to what they’re in. I praised Julie Christie’s acting in the film, so good both her women characters could be shown close up. Evelyn Leeper volunteered she’d voted *Fahrenheit* first for Best Novel Retro-Hugo. I, *Mission of Gravity*; both, I said, were poetic, *Mission* spare, *Fahrenheit* lush. I admired the beautiful seductive falseness of the hypnotic

Minding true things by what their mockeries be.

Shakespeare

earpieces called Seashells. The book-burning reminded Veal of Chinese emperor Chin Shih Huang Ti.

Meanwhile the Masquerade Director had resigned. This was in fact a relief. Sandra Manning and the Wombat stepped up to the plate. After the show had gone on, I took soundings, and learned that people outside the works hardly knew aught was amiss nor what sweat ran. Applause. Cary Riall remained as Master of Ceremonies. The judges were Janet Anderson, Gabaldon, and me. Anderson also had to be Workmanship Judge backstage. As an idea, that particular double-casting is bad, don’t try it: it will probably make the show start late, and frazzle the judges, already under pressure (we’re always comparing apples and

androids, and with, say, thirty entries, if we spent two minutes on each we’d be out deliberating for an hour). But we managed.

There was naturally a jackalope, with Kokopelli getting into the act (Best Journeyman; Anti-Workmanship Award; Tasha Cady and a host of others, including 2nd-generation fan Ben Massoglia). Best Novice (entering only as “Rogue”) was a Legolas from the *Lord of the Rings* films, skilfully showing “the most difficult emotions, fear, anger, joy, sadness”, i.e. each harsh and blank. Best Presentation, Novice (and Workmanship Award for belt construction; entering as “Audrey”) was “Ultimate Male Fantasy”, a belly-dancer balancing a can of Guinness. Most Mystical, Novice (Workmanship Award for attention to detail; Anita Long Hemsath), was “The Crone” in a feathered headpiece, who knelt well and stood strong. Roche, backing onstage as Fog from *The Fifth Element*, white shorts, double-sleeved blue tunic, gold Fhloston Paradise emblem, won Best Re-Creation, Master (Workmanship Award for clever cheats & recycling). Most Commercial, Master (Workmanship Award for millinery; Frances Burns, worn by Diane Harris), was a Gibson girl under a swell hat with a tall drink on a tray, vamping the M.C. to no avail; he took his own glass from the lectern to explain “She could have gotten my attention with a Pan-

When the precision makes the moment happen.

Frederica von Stade

Galactic Gargle Blaster.” Best in Show, and Best Workmanship, was “Chrysalis” (Master; Gail Wolfenden-Steib, Yergen-Jennings), cloaked, dark ruffled masks, silver inside, a final pose on the low platform.

Guinness for me at the S.E. Konkin III memorial party. As I wrote elsewhere, he was partisan, quarrelsome, insistent, and in his way genial. He would make you out to be a Libertarian for saying the word “liberty”, but he also made friends. Keith Kato threw the first of three 30th anniversary chili parties (reprised at the Worldcon, then at Loscon XXXI). Dozens of masks on the walls of the costumers’ party. At a pirates’ party Dyer, whom his wife had sent off to play, poured home-made cordials. At the Nippon 2007 party Musubuchi told me about layout. At 2:15 Lee and Barry Gold were leaving the Main Lodge; filking slept, so I did.

Daytime Sunday, the Business Meeting. Green cried “Christian, you can’t set your phone on ‘vibrate’ and call yourself.” Later, “One day I’ll use the LASFS Rules of Order and you’ll all be sorry.” Judy Bemis said “I’ve been to the LASFS, but I don’t know what

that means.” I said “*We* don’t know what it means.” I gave my Art Show docent tour, and took Ctein’s. The changing technique of Cherry, who’d taught himself to paint, reminded Ctein of advice from Kelly Freas. Kelly sent a medley of drawings, sketches, and fine-art prints, within reach of most buyers. I liked an artist’s proof of “Transition”, one of his simplest and best. Look how he shows it’s a mask by beaming light through the eyes. But why is a mask in space? Is it an idea of protection whose glittering metal is hollow?

Philip Schulz won a 3rd Prize for s-f *origami* (mostly, some cut, some glued), space ships of wire mesh even. Jim Humble, another for a crouching gargoyle, forefeet back as if to leap, tongue correctly stuck out. George

Competing to see who can be the least devout.

Montesquieu

Todd’s “Catalyst” was a floating half-bubble city whose lightning hit a mesa with columns like Greece. Nancy Strowger won a 1st Prize for “The Mischief-Maker’s Key”, a blue hand reaching through the keyhole, the key too close. Theresa Mather, another for “Night Flight”, coiled dragon and stars on three turkey feathers. Sarah Clemens won a 2nd Prize for “Stigmata”, a woman in white floating cruciform amid church ruins, hibiscus for blood. Sylvana Gish won Best in Show for “Echo”, bronze salvaged from the U.S.S. *Arizona*. I asked my tour “How can we see loss?” They said “Her face looking up, her clutching hand.” Ctein brought two photos of iridescent pahoehoe shot while he was GoH at Westercon LIII (Honolulu, ’00), one of Niagara Falls mastered by mist.

At the GoH banquet, Cherry talked of meeting Michael Whelan who’d just illustrated *The Bloody Sun*. Alexander talked of singing music she loved. I talked of participation. In the bar Gelb, Geri Sullivan, Ben Yalow worked at lapsize computers (I believe “desktop”; even you don’t believe “palmtp”). Fireworks outside. Yalow said New York’s were best in the world. Later Val Ontell admitted “He’s right.” Green Lanterns with San Diego, victorious unopposed for Westercon LIX. Oscar Meyer wieners at the Chicago for ’08 Worldcon party, Bobbie DuFault the chair of the ’05 NASFiC serving drinks. I said *Fahrenheit 451* was bleakly hopeful. At filking I heard “Got to find the future, ’cause the present’s all I see.” Michelle Dickrey sang her haunting *Alice* song, “Save me, save me, I’m lost in my memory,” not what I find in Carroll but fine.

Half past eleven on Monday; to moderate “Is NASA the Answer or the Problem?”,

Jonathan Post, David Williams, Veronica Zabala. Jim Glass, in the audience, had worked on the F-1. Post said NASA had done great things but went bureaucratic. Zabala praised space spin-offs. Williams said NASA research grants funded geology. We talked of

It is enough to make one sigh deeply.

Shen Fu

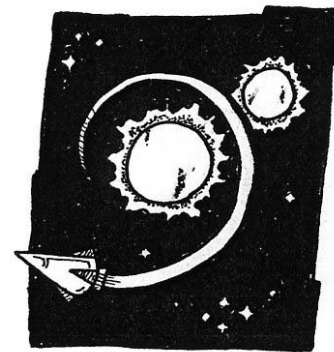
the school programs. From the audience, getting in kids is worth much. Post said NASA wasn’t fast enough. I said, we have to learn to do things without goading from an enemy. Zabala said, let’s get back on the horse. Half past two, no panelists but me for “Did S-F Change Our World?” The audience voted to stay. From one, “Today those born into s-f think it normal.” I said maybe the change was that people could be born into s-f. Another, “Some things are no longer fiction.” Veal said “Lots of things not in s-f happened anyway.” Another noted the software symbiosis; why not lawyers or mathematicians, of whom far fewer among us? Today’s seeming growth of diversity we may not have created, but we fed with the fuel in our hands.

There’d been a mock space mission at nearby Challenger Space Center. The Golds went. Their flight directors tried to explain radioactive debris as a solar flare. Lee said it must be from disintegration of a satellite with a plutonium drive, or secret atom-bomb tests, or, when the video library couldn’t show Ceres, radioactivity there after the destruction of the planet between Mars and Jupiter. Astronomy on a golf course with Tony Laconte of Stargazing for Everyone and an

But there are always at least two points of view.

Heinlein

11” telescope, Mike Weasner and the mighty Meade ETX. Weasner told me they saw an “Iridium flare” — a solar-panel satellite in the Iridium network catching and reflecting the Sun. While I helped take down the Art Show, Mather and Marty Massoglia suggested better



displays for the Print Shop.

Massoglia and Mark Leeper are both origamists; Mark had given workshops. At the Dead Dog party we wondered if President Kennedy’s Moon program helped *Star Trek* reach the air. Next year’s Westercon “Due North” (Calgary) had sent ten to look and learn. I told them resilience won.

Ringworld’s Children Short Review by John Hertz

With the year 2004 done, we can say *Ringworld’s Children*, Larry Niven’s latest, may well be Best Novel. Deft, neat, brilliant, hugely imagined, it serves these with a terse crisp poetry few of our writers achieve. Niven introduces it explaining he had not planned another Ringworld book; it was sparked by fans discussing the first three on the Internet. “This is a playground for the mind,” he says. “It’s a puzzle too, a maze. Question every turn or you’ll get lost. When you’ve finished the book, remember not to lock the gate” (p. 12). Many authors would not trouble to warn us, but Niven is big-hearted. Among his many paradoxes is whether this is true of these characters. We now have many kinds of Protector, of which four feature here, far more intelligent than humans, faster, stronger, capable of self-sacrifice, but fighting, fighting. Benevolence is not magnanimity, and protecting a sapient being even when vital is a tricky business. Nine hundred years in our future a truly old Protector asks a woman, about religions, whether humans feel a need for the companionship of someone greater. “We outgrew them,” she says, a soldier in a technological army that gives her the rank of *Detective*, a leader who like so many of us today entangles love and dominance. At the end – well, I won’t tell you, but as you follow Niven’s hinting you’ll recall in wonder the end of his first book about the Protectors thirty years ago. [Reprinted by permission from *Vanamonde 610*]