

The Devniad Book 82b

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Orbita Dicta **Heard in the Halls of** **Readercon 14** **at the (cartographically dubious)** **Boston Marriot Burlington** **Burlington, Massachusetts, U.S.A.** **July 12-14, 2002**

Readercon, that most lit up of speculative fiction conventions, is a feast of many voices. The following pages contain some semblance of quite a few of them, overheard or (let's get mystical) perhaps only imagined by your humble reporter plus a proud list of contributors (spies) to whom many thanks, including Ernest Lilley, Dan Kimmel, Lisa Hunt, Chip Hitchcock, Art Henderson, Glenn Grant, Richard Duffy, and the invaluable Darcy Devney.

*[Usually these reports commence with a sendoff quote from a clueless colleague at my office; everyone this year was too busy or too wise to this trick, but luckily, British reviewer **Graham Sleight** (rhymes with "sight") gives me a story to fill in]*

One of the people at work — a bright guy, distinguished scientist, asked where I was going. I tried to explain about Readercon, its speculative fiction purpose, high literary level, you know.

There was a pause, then he said, "So is it all blokes then?"

[New writer Walter Hunt is proudly lugging around a plastic model of a scout ship from his military SF series that starts with The Dark Wing]

The artist did this out of two airplane kits and a tube of lipstick.

[Writer/critic Brett Cox will no longer be the best-read person in southern Alabama]

Jeanne and I are moving to Vermont! To Northfield, ten miles from Montpelier. I got a job teaching at Norwich College.

[On the Punk Rock and Spec Fic panel, Readercon co-founder Eric Van recalls the gooey old days]

Bob [Colby] and I both had one of those apartments where you never invite the other person over because it's too messy.

[Co-Guest of Honor Gwyneth Jones recalls one magic night in Wimbledon, early 70s]

Everybody else in the house was unconscious, so I stayed up all night reading this strange book I found called *Stranger in a Strange Land*.

[Writer Shariann Lewitt sure has street cred]

In 1979, home abandoned me and I ended up living in a box in St. Mark's Place in New York ... There was a bunch of us; we were known as black punks or Goth punks.

[New fantasy writer Holly Black walked the razor edge of fashion]

I came in at the end of punk, and it was kind of sad for me ... but still, I was the only eighth grader with half my head shaved.

[For Jones, the resemblance is obvious]

Science fiction and fantasy are like punk and rock; people on the outside think they're the same thing. People on the inside can't understand how people on the outside can't tell the difference.

[Black links words and music]

Speculative fiction freaks are like punk freaks ... Mystery is jazz, because respectable people do it. And romance would be country.

[Some of us do try to grow up, like litchick fantasy writer Elizabeth Hand]

I have two kids. I have a certain responsibility not to change my taste ... Punk was a scene that I loved, but it was 25 years ago.

[Cox names names]

Other SF punk literature would include Pat Cadigan's "Pretty Boy Crossover" — and one of my favorite unknown stories, a 300-word short by Lewis Shiner called "Oz," that postulates Lee Harvey Oswald as a rock star.

... What new music should you try out now? You ought to be listening to the Strokes and my new favorite band, the Detroit Cobras.

[As the panel on misreading begins, editor Teresa Nielsen Hayden reacts to some initial confusion]

Usually when I have dreams like this, I don't have any clothes on.

[But you can't say things like that around people like writer James D. Macdonald]

— Usually when I have dreams like this, you don't either.

[But he's pretty serious about textual misreading]

I'm Jim Macdonald, and you cannot determine anything about me personally from my writing ... People who claim that they do know the author's intention are fruitbats.

[Grandmaster Hal Clement admits misreadings may begin at home]

I've just been reading 400 pages of proof, and I find that I did this — had inconsistencies — rather seriously in the Mesklin stories.

[New writer and worthy Campbell nominee Alexander C. Irvine is chasing a doctorate in English, so he's thought about this stuff fairly recently]

It's been my experience that the last person you want to trust on this is the author.

... I have read many books with readings that hadn't occurred to me, but were responsible to the text and I had to take them seriously.

[Nielsen Hayden notices Macdonald's champing at the lit bit]

How many proofs that subtext is nonsense do you have, Jim?

[He's come loaded for postmodernist bear]

— Five.

[But Irvine still thinks subtext rules]

The whole problem is heightened because we're talking about fiction. We're not talking

about going to the grocery store. Or if we are, it's a grocery store that doesn't exist.

[Macdonald's stubborn to the end]

Subtext is reading between the lines. And what's between the lines is *blank*.

[Nielsen Hayden has heard of some monster misreading in her time]

... When he was young, my husband was told there was this book called *The Hobbit*, and he might enjoy it. But he got confused about the title, and started reading this book called *Babbitt*. It was pretty mundane for a while, but he knew some fantasies started like that ...

[At dinner in the hotel restaurant, has bro-in-law Bob Kuhn lese-majested our Co-Guest of Honor?]

I was talking with Octavia Butler, and she asked me *not* to read her books ... I'd told her I read for enjoyment and expect a happy ending.

[From the audience of the Density in Fiction panel, first-class fantasist Elizabeth Willey theorizes]

I think it was Ernest Rutherford who said that a theory was no good if it could not be explained to a barmaid.

[Caliph of Criticism John Clute clarifies slightly]

— A barmaid in a college town.

[Was it fan Lisa Hunt who liked something writer Greer Gilman said; and if so, was it in the Density in Fiction panel?]

In *Temporary Agency*, by Rachel Pollack, the U.S. is dominated by a sort of K-Mart shamanism.

[To begin the panel on Colonized by the Future, writer James Cambias calls attention to my nifty PDA-and-folding-keyboard ensemble]

There's a gentleman in the front row setting up a computer the size of a pack of cigarettes ...

[Writer/critic Judith Berman is a tad tired of all this]

The technological fatigue that people now experience because of the transformations in the workplace ... Technology is now something in which you're enmeshed. You have these corporations fighting on your desk, and you're forced to get caught up in it.

[John Clute thinks the future may hold more alternate histories]

Kim Stanley Robinson's Mars series was a valiant attempt to write that traditional let's say positive science fiction novel ... What's his latest? *[The Years of Rice and Salt]* An alternate history novel.

[Cambias sees recent improvement, though]

Some of this is the conscious effort, in the face of some criticism that all the heroes have WASP names and so on, to expand the scope of what we're writing about.

Some of the post-colonial tradition of American science fiction may be the result of the writers' getting out more.

[Clute pins cyberpunk's black butterfly to his board]

Cyberpunk is rather like a noir mystery of science fiction. And the reason that the writers do it is that a crime novel detects the nature of the world that is already there ... it's an archaeology. Not the kind of factitious knowledge that allows them to take over cyberspace.

[Any guy that writes an SF novel modeled on Preston Sturges flicks can spot a movie parallel a mile away; writer John Kessel talks my language]

The way it is in the movie *Chinatown* is that the world is the way it is and can't be changed.

[In the audience, I'm delighted to subreference his point]

— "Forget it, Jake. It's cyberpunk."

[Clute points out prophets may go without (enough) honor in their own genres]

A novel by Paul Park or Maureen McHugh doesn't tend to dominate the field. Unless in the confines of a room such as this.

... To me, still the best science fiction novel of the last 5 or 10 years is Neal Stephenson's *Cryptonomicon* ... Under the surface, it's a profound SF novel.

[Hell with the topic, by now we're talking who's really good; Cambias ends on a great new exemplar]

Some of Ted Chiang's stories tend to follow the old idea. More positive and sophisticated.

[In the lobby, I buttonhole Co-GOH Gwyneth Jones; loved your new fantasy Bold as Love, how many more to follow in its series?]

Five, if I last.

[Alex Irvine greatly impresses me as a panelist, so I attend a reading from his debut novel, A Scattering of Jades. Starts with Mexican magic in Old New York, beautifully written; I'll pick up a copy in the bookshop tomorrow]

[In the panel on Psi: The Trope That Refuses to Die, writer Michael A. Burstein looks on the dark side]

A book is the ultimate psi communication. Someone who's been dead for years can bore you.

[Theater prof Andrea Hairston starts the panel on Race in F&SF impatient with people impatient with Nalo Hopkinson's Carib-spiced dialog]

They say, *Midnight Robber*, difficult language. I say, not really: try German.

[Which reminds grandmaster Samuel R. Delany of an insight from his vast store]

— Oddly enough, Edgar Allen Poe's black characters all speak with Caribbean rhythms, not Southern.

[Can't read the entire name of this woman from India in the third row, but her initials look like YS]

I think it's important to, although it's difficult, try to stretch and write about characters from other places or cultures ...

[Editor Sheree R. Thomas gives us carte blanche]

— So everybody, you have permission to write about India —

[However, YS has one simple request]

— But do your research first! ... People sometimes seem to forget that Hinduism is not a dead religion, for instance.

[Writer Hiromi Goto explains the wise author's strategy for handling race]

She will write with herself at the center, and explain herself later if she feels she has to.

[If you're having a panel on Ecological Disaster, invite people who have created one; like our Co-GOH]

I'm Octavia Butler, and I've ruined society two or three times. In *Dawn*, I took it apart. And in *Clay's Ark*, I did it again.

[Ask up-and-coming hard SF writer Peter Watts: what came first, the science or the fiction?]

When I was very young, I imprinted like a Lorenz duckling on *The Sheep Look Up* ... that book helped urge me into a career as a marine biologist.

[For writer/reviewer Thomas A. Easton, disaster is kind of a downer]

In David Brin's *Uplift*, the advanced species take it as a given that civilizations inevitably ruin their world ... worlds have to be fallowed.

It's a horribly agricultural premise. That ecological collapse is normal, inevitable in the course of civilization.

[Watts won't blame our stars]

I tend to think we make our own predators —

[Butler replies with a point to which she'll return several times this weekend]

— We are our own predators!

[She wonders if our growth is benign]

In my junior high school classroom about 1960, a girl asked if America was going to go on growing forever. And the teacher answered yes. I tried to think of something that goes on growing and growing and never stops. And all I could think of was cancer.

[Watts turns to another Brunner novel for a model disaster tale]

When you take the environment and make it the story, I think you're essentially writing a sermon. In *The Sheep Look Up*, yeah it's about the disastrous environment, but that's the background. The *story* is about a guy trying to make a deal with the Japanese for water purifiers, and so on.

[SF Chronicle news editor Andrew I. Porter digresses into what's wrecking the ecology of our field]

We're going to withhold more money from authors, you see, to cover the cost of controversial books ... Because of 9/11, all your liability insurance is much more expensive. Some bookstores are going without, or going out of business.

[And speaking of terrorist-sponsored disasters, Watts mentions one homegrown DIY possibility]

You can now download a genotype off the Internet, shake it together with some nucleotides, and make your own polio!

[Jones tries to keep things balanced]

Arguably there's only one problem: We have too many people.

... But there are still a huge number of people healthy and happy, more than 100 years ago ... Not in a simple way, but in a complicated way, I can be hopeful, yes.

[Why, Easton gets almost cheery]

Some people have said that the world's carrying capacity for people to live like Americans would be half a billion ...

My students say that AIDS will destroy our population. But I say, not even close. It only kills 3 million people a year. We're still 80 million people a year ahead.

[Butler thinks all ecology is local]

There's more to ecology than science. There's politics, for instance. You need to do, not just science, but vote for the right people ...

[Readercon Biobib Biggie Richard Duffy sends this one in, perhaps explaining the phenomenon of pink elephants: at "Style vs. Style vs. Style" on Friday evening, the panelists describe the most stylistically fun scene they've ever written. Pat Murphy (who was fabulous all weekend) wrote her scene in the style of Jane Austen, involving an outdoor picnic whose attendees studiously ignore the pair of elephants copulating just across the way, in plain view —all present pretending there is absolutely nothing untoward happening or interesting to see. Murphy says this was inspired by her seeing at the Oakland Zoo a real pair of amorous elephants eliciting amusing reactions among the spectators, including the kinds of things parents said to their kids to explain it away. And that seeing and hearing live, heavy elephants engaged in this activity from fairly close up makes quite a powerful impression. From the front row, writer Greer Gilman quips]

— Did the Earth move?

[At the Meet the Prose Party, all I recall of many smart and hilarious conversations occurs when flix critic Dan Kimmel shows a picture of his 5-year-old daughter Amanda to our group]

You can tell she's my daughter. She has my hair.

[Freud look-alike Bob Kuhn is crazy about bald jokes]
— So that's where it went. [lots of laughs]

[Kimmel, gamely]
— Look who's talking ...

[In the bookshop, dealer Larry Smith has his finger on the con's wrist]
Traffic at the table this Readercon has been kind of like the traffic on 95 on the way here: pulse surge, pulse surge.

[Thought he was just an incredible panel hog, but turns out Evolution in SF and Reality was supposed to be a talk/discussion, so anthropologist John Costello actually had the first 30 minutes allotted all to himself; some interesting stuff]

Darwin had Mendel's book. The pages were even cut ... but whether he ever read it, he never realized that particulate variety might be a mechanism for human evolution ...

... Reading *Slan* — little Johnny Cross is a mutation, born 2 or 3 thousand years from now ... He has little antennae growing out of his head ... Slans are presumably incapable of breeding with their mothers. We will forget about tilions and ligers in zoos, which are perfectly capable of interbreeding with each other —

[Writer Robert Sawyer catcalls from the front row]
— But only in the Ozark zoos!

[At 38 minutes and Costello still talking, Sawyer decides to plug Hominids himself]

We probably all understand the basic methods of human evolution in here, and there are weightier issues to get to. Like my book!

[Sawyer knows how to bring a room party to a head]
It's the most hotly debated issue in modern paleoanthropology ... whether *Homo sapiens* and *Homo sapiens neandertalensis* are separate species.

Up until recently, we had little physical evidence, just some skulls ... I'm hosting a party tonight in Room 604 and I have the skull of a Neanderthal you can look at.

[He defends Arnold Schwarzenegger look-alikes]
... If you look at Eastern European populations today, you can see some features that may remind us of Neanderthal brow ridges ... However, the Neanderthal brow ridge is not a

shelf of bone, but has a distinctive dip in the middle ...

... We may never have any Neanderthal DNA. *CSI* and movies to the contrary, DNA degrades quite rapidly except in optimum storage conditions.

We have 46 chromosomes, apes have 48 ... I've put my money on Neanderthals' having 48 chromosomes.

[Writer Hal Clement suspects evidence ain't plentiful]

That figure of 8000 [Neanderthal] fossils — was it 8000 fragments or 8000 wholes?

[Sawyer confirms skeletons are scanty]
— Fragments, lots of fragments. The most generous estimate is 400 individuals.

[Summing up, Sawyer kids Costello — but seriously]
John, you remind me of every other scientist in this field I've ever read or talked to ... The data that best supports their data is the solid data. And the data that doesn't is the stuff that we may not be sure about for 50 years.

[Before the discussion on the Fiction of Memorial GOH John Brunner, fan and friend Joe Petronio reviews a panel he just attended]

Stepan Chapman was a great panelist, really funny ... He had everybody laughing out loud. [Consults the invaluable biobibliography notes, or biobibs, in the Program Guide] Oh, he did a novel: *The Troika*. I've got to get it.

[For radio maven Jim Freund, Brunner contains multitudes]

On one Web site, it stated that John Brunner is best remembered for *The Shockwave Rider*, a novel that could be said to have invented cyberpunk ... Another source said Brunner is best remembered for his novel *The Sheep Look Up*. And another one said it was *Stand on Zanzibar* ... While I best remember him for his short stories, like a great little story called "The Totally Rich."

[Artist Lissanne Lake liked his softer side]

I best remember him for his great fantasy *The Traveler in Black* ... But I agree he's usually best remembered for these large-scope novels, with hundreds of characters and a really global perspective.

[Octavia Butler pays high tribute]

I look on Brunner as one of my teachers ... In high school, I found his work and began reading it voraciously ... He could tell a story, and that mattered to me.

[British writer F. Gwynplaine MacIntyre comes accoutered in a black Prisoner sport coat with outlined white lapels, plus high black leather boots, a sporran — and some strong opinions on his subject]

He was strongest at the short story length ...

He wrote a wonderful short story called "The Last Lonely Man" ... When you die, your soul or memories pass on to that person you select, and you never really die ... The last man is full of the souls of all that have gone before.

... Brunner hated humanity, and he loved people.

[Freund pairs up Brunner and John Christopher]

My favorite nonexistent Ace double would be *No Blade of Grass/The Sheep Look Up*.

[Fan Ed Meskys supplies some personal details]

When his first wife died, Marjorie, he became terribly depressed. He had a major novel half-finished, and he was too depressed to go on with it.

[Lake has an artist's enthusiasms, alright]

Have you read *Total Eclipse*? I love it. It's the most depressing book I've ever read. Fabulous!

... He would want to be noted for his social caution and prediction.

[Apparently Brunner was often among The Totally Poor, per MacIntyre]

His characters, where they were amoral, tended to be obsessed with money. *He* was obsessed with money. He had some extreme money problems — even for an author.

[Wish Lake had brought a sample to show]

... For *Traveller in Black*, he was the recipient of one of the most perfect book covers ever, by the young Diane Dillon. Chaos is coming out and he's bringing it to order. It's just amazing.

[Butler considers him one of her Patternmasters]

One of his books, a lesser-known one called *Polymath*, I think influenced me ... You strand people on another world, and throw difficulties at them. But the real difficulties turn out to be other humans.

[Freund to NESFA Press: hint, hint]

I think we may see the time when yes, we see the NESFA *Complete Brunner* coming out ...

[Out in the halls again, after newlywed SFRevu webzine editor Ernest Lilley riffs for attractive Atlantic Monthly reporter Liz Wasserman on the prospects for a Third Age of SF, Artemis editor Ian Randal Strock is impressed]

That was amazing! I had no idea you could be eloquent.

[Lilley is modest]

— Beautiful women have that effect on me.

[Strock is skeptical]

— You mean, now that you're married and harmless.

[Lilley isn't dead yet]

— Mostly harmless.

[The fascinating event known as Reader Cannes 2: The Chronology Protection Case concerns a 40-minute student film made of one of writer Paul Levinson's stories, without his knowledge but eventually to his great delight; Levinson shows the DVD and discusses how this all came about]

So I was searching the Web for my name, which I do very infrequently ... three times a day.

[Love may be blind, but filmgoers don't have to be]

All of the women in this film are current or former girlfriends of Jay *[Kensinger, the film's creator/star]*, and I think you can really judge the kind of relationship by what you see onscreen. For example, the nurse is a former girlfriend and I don't think their relationship was very good. You know, in the film she's very, very sarcastic, much more than she needs to be.

[Who better to begin the panel on Meta-Fantasy than John Crowley?]

Almost all my books are about the experience of reading a book, to some extent ...

That can be very boring in some hands; I've often wondered if my writings are included in that ... Meta-fiction can be a very bad idea.

[Hey, is that writer Pat Murphy? Good question]

The second novel in a sort of series I'm doing, *Wild Angel*, by Mary Maxwell, by Max Merriwell,

by Pat Murphy ... That's why I'm on the panel. It's also why I could be locked up at any moment.

... I explained the whole Max Merriwell thing step by step to my father, and when I got to the end, my father said, "Why would anyone want to do anything like that?" So, panel: why would anyone want to do anything like that?

[Meta-critic John Clute holds up the mirror to our genres]

Science fiction can be seen very crudely as a breakthrough into the future, and fantasy can be seen very crudely — and cruelly — as a breakthrough into the past.

[Writer and academic Heinz Insu Fenkl's recent novel sounds like a trip]

A book I co-authored, *Shadows Bend*, is a road novel as by one of H. P. Lovecraft's pseudonyms, Richard Raleigh. It's about H. P. Lovecraft and Robert Howard on a road trip being pursued by shoggoths ... it's a sort of psychobiographical criticism.

[I like it when someone can quote right to the point, like writer and poet Terry McGarry]

Tim Powers said if writers wrote what they know, all fiction would be about people sitting in front of typewriters —

[Crowley is delighted too]
— It is!

[I love it when Clute, almost alone among critics, explores the mysteries of our experience of reading]

Most moving is when you can see how the artist does what he does. You can see how he's achieving it by very simple means, with this amazing multiplication of effects ... You look at a painting by Velazquez, you can see the man in armor, totally realistic — but look closely and you can also see the brush.

[Murphy started this stuff young]

My answer is a lot more simplistic. Why would anybody do anything like that? Because it's a whole lot of fun! ... It's the same impulse that, when you're younger, makes you put G.I. Joe's head on Barbie's shoulders.

[On the central meta-fantastic experience, Fenkl can go both ways]

When one is reading, ordinarily one should not have a sense of bilocation. One should be

immersed in the narrator's world ... But in good meta-fantasy, bilocation is the *point* ... It's kind of like Buddhist mindfulness.

[Nobody circumlocutes like Clute]

I think we're at the beginning of understanding how to write a successful fantasy text ... As opposed to science fiction, where the critical theory is well established, perhaps in excess of the needs of the field.

[Editor/academic Farah Mendlesohn echoes a lack I've felt myself; c'mon, all you other critics]

John's developed a huge amount of useful tools in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, for talking about this. What's scary is that no one is using these terms yet.

[Mendlesohn recommends]

Wanderers and Islanders, a new book by a British author named Steve Cockayne. It reminds me most of *Lud-in-the-Mist*, while being absolutely nothing like it. I can't recommend it highly enough, by the way.

[Out in the halls again: at the snack bar, NESFAN Tony Lewis hails me just as I pay the cashier]

So, you beat those counterfeiting charges!

[At the Readercon Bookclub, writer Connie Hirsch wonders what you might call the videogame if Ursula Le Guin sold spinoff rights to her Earthsea franchise]

Sparrowhawk and the Chamber of Secrets?

[On the Biological Hard SF panel, writer Paul Di Filippo suggests that, even if sharks are indeed immune to cancer (a claim recently disproven), injecting yourself with shark DNA is unlikely to make you immune; grandmaster Hal Clement sharpens up the warning]

You'd probably just be more likely to become a lawyer.

[Writer/broadcasting broad Ellen Kushner discusses her terrific NPR radio show and vows she'd cut her throat before doing a Sound & Spirit on the topic of racism; but should she change her mind, writer/cutup Michael Swanwick suggests a crowd-(well, mob-)

pleasing opener for her playlist]

Songs of the Southern Klan!

[In the combined kaffeeklatsch of true literary luminaries Michael Swanwick and Paul Park, Swanwick mourns the movement that wasn't]

Some years ago, a group of Canadian SF people were feeling envious of cyberpunk, and said that Canadian SF ought to come up with its own attitude. Yves Menard said, "How about polite deferral?" and the whole movement ended right there.

[Besides his just-out short story collection If Lions Could Speak, Park may have more fine stuff on the way]

I've currently got a big fantasy novel in the hands of an agent.

[Why the last several years no novel, Paul?]

I got married late in life and had children late in life. Unfortunately, I had established a way of writing that was completely incompatible with these states. I had to find a whole new way of working, more in bits and pieces ...

[Swanwick recently took part in a project wherein he spun off Rilke's Letters to a Young Poet]

I did a "Letter to a Young Science Fiction Writer" ... And as any stranded time traveller can tell you, a book makes a wonderful bottle in which to put a message.

[Swanwick says his wife Marianne Porter has noticed (at least) one curious thing about him I hadn't]

She said to me, "Every one of your books is 20 chapters long. And every chapter about 20 pages."

[Back in the hall, a friend (who wisely chooses anonymity) may not be so much antifeminist as overtrilogied]

The Gryphon Award was supposed to encourage woman fantasy writers. Shouldn't we be weeding them out instead?

[At the NESFA Press table, Czar Tony Lewis passes on hot gossip about a famous fan editor and a longtime NESFAn; not true, just hot]

Andy Porter just proposed marriage to Paula Lieberman. *[Pause]* Perhaps not sincerely.

[Lewis also recalls the stuff of painful fannish conrunning legend from Miami Beach 1977]

By the time SunCon happened, Don Lundry was on his *third* full committee —

[NESFAn Seth Breidbart remembers that one too] — and his second bankrupt hotel!

[Writer Leigh Grossman shows off his new Powerpuff Girls novelization Bubble's Butterfly Hunt with a certain prideful rue]

The sad thing is, it will sell more copies than anything else I've ever written.

[Unaffianced editor Andrew I. Porter demonstrates opposite if not apposite Vulcan gestures]

Live long and prosper. Or — *[turns hand upside down]* die and decay rapidly.

[Academic and writer Faye Ringel interviews Co-Guest of Honor Octavia E. Butler, who found Ronnie Raygun quite an inspiration]

Then Ronald Reagan was elected, and he gave me the idea for the *Xenogenesis* books ... He was talking about winnable nuclear wars. He was talking about *livable* nuclear wars. He was saying we'd be much safer if we had more nuclear weapons.

I thought if people were buying this, if they were voting for this man, there was something basically wrong with the human race. There was a design error ... So that's how Ronald Reagan helped me write three novels.

[Ringel's done her (biology) homework]

Your work seems to me to have a lot to do with the benefits of symbiosis and the dangers of parasitism.

[Butler recalls a chance encounter; what odds?]

I said I was probably the only SF writer who has a favorite biologist. She asked who, and I said Lynn Margulis. There was this pause, and she said, "Lynn Margulis is my mother."

[Butler on the congoing life]

I used to be very shy. I would sit there and shake. I give myself pep talks before doing something like this. And my pep talk for this is, "Go out there and enjoy these people and encourage them to enjoy you." *[Applause]*

... Conventions remind me of being in college, and getting together with a bunch of friends and deciding how to fix the world ... *Most* people have to give that up.

[On writing and its rewards]

One of the reasons I don't have kids is that my first kid was writing. And if I had more, I'm not sure they could survive the sibling rivalry.

... The book that was most fun to write was *Wild Seed*. *Wild Seed* was my reward for writing *Kindred*.

[If Butler makes us confront some of our fears in her books, she doesn't spare her own]

"Bloodchild" was kind of a benefit of *Xenogenesis* ... I got to do research in the jungles of Peru.

I had this phobia that something without a backbone was some kind of a mistake ...

Where I went, there were no leeches, but there were botflies. It's a wonderful insect parent. It makes sure its young are in a warm place with plenty to eat ... They lay their eggs in the wounds other animals have left. And in the Amazon, lots of things are munching on you.

I was able to desensitize myself to some extent ... The camps I went to had outhouses, which were inevitably filled with centipedes. You just had to learn to get along with them.

[Luckily, between this last thought and dinner comes a whole other tasty interview, as editor David G. Hartwell interviews our other living Co-Guest of Honor, Gwyneth Jones; Hartwell starts by revealing her secret identity]

Gwyneth started publishing adult science fiction in 1984, with her novel *Divine Endurance*. She also has a career writing children's books as both Gwyneth Jones and Ann Hallam.

[Apparently Butler's phobias didn't bug Jones]

As a child I collected worms as pets, and frogs as pets. And slugs. We used to make little dioramas, and slugs make really good seals.

Except that they melt.

[Hartwell asks about early influences]

Who were you reading in science fiction when you wrote *Divine Endurance*?

[Like any other SF fan of her era with a pulse in her brain, Jones turns out to be a Roger Zelazny fan]

— *Lord of Light*. *Lord of Light* above all.

[Hartwell touches on the wonder years]

Aside from going to university and not working, what were you doing? Sex drugs and rock and roll?

[Jones laughs, embarrassed; seems she's thinking of her earlier anecdote about reading Stranger]

— Yes ... I didn't explain in that earlier panel that I couldn't sleep because the wallpaper wouldn't leave still.

[She offers a glamorous glimpse of the reviewer's life]

I told David Pringle that I should have a semi-regular gig *[in Interzone]*, because he didn't have a woman as a regular reviewer. So I did that for a short while, but then it became obvious that I was trashing the wrong books. So we agreed to part because of mutual differences.

... Later I went off reviews a bit anyway, because I couldn't bear to write "Gosh, they don't write them like *Neuromancer* anymore" anymore.

[Notice that both Co-Guests of Honor here admire the same biologist; what odds again?]

When I went to the Norwegian national convention in 1998, I found myself on a panel with a scientist who had worked with Lynn Margulis on cooperative evolution. And that was one of my biggest thrills in the world of science fiction.

[About her alien-invasion novel series White Queen, North Wind, and Phoenix Café]

I wanted to write something that would pull together my puzzle about colonialism and my puzzle about feminism ...

I always knew I wanted to do the aliens arriving, like merchants arriving in India. Like merchants playing off the princes against each other. Not because they want to conquer, but because they want to protect their markets.

[Hartwell remarks that her fine 2001 novel Bold as Love just won the Arthur C. Clarke award]

Yep. Should have put "fantasy" on the cover long ago ... How far in the future is it? Nominally, it's set about 10 years from now, if you wanted to be very picky.

[From the audience, I rudely refer to a line in Bold as Love listing tourists London wouldn't miss, including "vast North American couples"; she shrugs]

Well, the character who says that says much worse things about lots of people ...

What do I think about America? I'm a traveler. Wherever I go, I try to make contact. There's only one country where I've been taken into people's homes, and that's here. *[Dinner at the hotel's new pub, Fitzwilliams', is enlivened by the shouted (that's one noisy place) conversation of a gang of bookdealers that let me tag along; while Art Henderson and Larry Smith clamor for more microbrews and single malts, Chris Logan Edwards talks (book)shop]*

Who's a hot new writer here? Well, there's this guy named Uncle River. He has a story in one of the Best Of anthologies now [*"My Stolen Sabre," Year's Best Fantasy 2, ed. David G. Hartwell, 2002*], but he's also a hermit. I mean a real hermit, who lives way out in the desert and doesn't see people for weeks or months. Interesting person.

[Edwards opines that the author of Kavalier and Clay might be an SF/F fellow-traveler]

Somebody should bring Michael Chabon as a guest to a con somewhere. On his Web site [www.michaelchabon.com], he's got information and a cover for an Arkham House book ... that doesn't exist. *[On Chabon's indeed extraordinary page, click on August Van Zorn]*

[At the Tiptree Award ceremonies for best gender-bending SF/F book, writer Pat Murphy recalls her long, demanding career as one of the organizers]

I don't cook, I don't sew, and I don't sing. This award has forced me to do all three.

[Token male judge Peter Halasz gushes about the Tiptree winner, The Kappa Child by Hiromi Goto]

I'll just read a few adjectives from the judges' comments: "captivating" ... "fresh" ... "insightful" ... "delightful" ... It's about a young woman growing up in the Canadian West, and it's wonderful.

[A glowing Goto accepts the award and a joke crown with class and a speech that knows how to move this crowd, and this reporter, dammit — did I mention she brought along her Mom?]

The tiara is the final touch that makes this just perfect ... When I was growing up in the small town of Nanton, Alberta, the rite of passage was something called the Queen's Ball ...

All my sisters were crowned Queen, except me ... *[touches tiara; big, warm wave of audience applause]*

Winning the Tiptree was my one science fiction dream. And my other science fiction dream was to meet Octavia E. Butler! *[more applause]* ... This is my first ever science fiction conference! *[applause crescendo]*

[Murphy sets up the next musical number, honoring Goto's work]

It's a fabulous book, and the main character has an obsession with cucumbers, and eats them constantly during her pregnancy.

[So naturally the ceremony climaxes with a whole big naughty choral number about cucumbers that you don't want to know about, trust me]

[For the 17th Kirk Poland Memorial Bad Prose Competition, a wildly popular Readercon tradition, inimitable MC and Kirk P creator Eric M. Van brings the contestants out one by one with ready-to-rumble, right-on introductions like this one]

He admitted that when he signed up, he had no idea how it works ... He wants to be Gene Wolfe when he grows up — Patrick O'Leary!

[Van announces the traditional John-Norman-bashing disincentives]

Prizes include the book *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From the Slave Pits of Mars*.

[The contest involves taking a chunk of actual bad prose and completing it more or less seamlessly, as in this one, which John Kessel reads]

... a vessel suitable for those short trips when you want to send your slave to the convenience asteroid.

[Or this one, with O'Leary reading]

... Perhaps he hadn't considered the words closely enough. Take the top of the "S" ...

[Or this sex-drenched entry read by Van himself]

... but I had always been the moose, and she the surprised and helpless forest ranger!

[When the carnage is complete, Van announces that writer Geary Gravel has, unusually, failed to take the lurid laurels]

— A new champion! With the same initials as our 13-times Eternal Champion: Glenn Grant!

[A later Grant report: when he claims he's just been presented with his autographed Gor novel anti-prize, editor Gordon Van Gelder inquires sweetly]

Is it one you already had?

[At breakfast Sunday, brother Michael Devney skewers negative about rearranging Cambridge, MA traffic laws for the new Segway personal transporter]

I doubt I'm going to own one. So I'll probably get run over by one.

[But later, his inner entrepreneur emerges] Hey, can you see me buying a fleet and renting them out at the Toronto Worldcon?

[Our sister Darcy envisages the carnage]

— "Ernest Lilley snaps the digital photo just as show-offy fan Bob Devney crashes into writer Elizabeth Hand."

[At Intergalactic Bookworks in the dealer's room, fan Johanna Henning has an — I was going to say unusual hobby, but that's pretty much a null term at an SF con]

I'm a bookbinder. That's why I like SF Book Club books. I can rebind them for myself —

[But amazingly (unfortunately?), the patron standing next to Henning turns out to be Ellen Asher]

— I'm the editor of the SF Book Club ... Our bindings are no worse than anyone else's.

[Henning recovers quickly; do we believe her?]

— Oh, I didn't mean that. But your books have wide margins, so I have the space I need in the binding.

[Intergalactic bookbabe Barb Kuenzig is petrified to say anything to this reporter lest she be quoted again like those other embarrassing times ... but any Mom will thaw when you ask about her son]

Oh! John has a new Web site:
www.kuenzigbooks.com

[There, that wasn't so painful, was it, Barb?]

[In the panel in re the Year in Short Fiction, editor Gordon Van Gelder of F&SF speaks for all the magazines]

None of us are doing well. But I don't look at a story and say, this will lose us 50 readers. I look

at the worth of the work ... Economic downturns can actually mean freedom.

[David Hartwell brings strange news]

The average anthology is not as good as one of the issues of the major magazines. The world has turned upside down, and I'm sorry to see it.

[Michael Swanwick turns to individual achievements]

And the winner for 2001 is Charles Stross. He came out of nowhere, almost. He had a few stories in England, and then in *Spectrum*, which you can get from David.

[I found "Lobsters" tasty too, but still think Swanwick is right the first time below, anent Andy Duncan's story about the chief designer of the Soviet space program]

In the June issue of *Asimov's*, Stross had a story called "Lobsters" ... I'd be raving about "The Chief Designer," and people would say "Lobsters" is better ... Then I read it. I'd say it's like Bruce Sterling if he had an imagination ... Barry Malzberg says it's like reading Alfred Bester at the peak of his powers.

[Hartwell demurs]

— I didn't like "Lobsters" very much. I thought much of it was like 1996, a little old hat.

... I thought James Patrick Kelly had three stories last year that were better. Starting with "Undone," in that same issue of *Asimov's*.

[Swanwick liked that one also (me too!)]

— People said all he did was do a pastiche of Alfred Bester and Cordwainer Smith.

And I said, *all?*

[Hartwell's hep to the shuck of the new]

— We always rank the talented new over the talented old.

[There's been buzz about Redshift, edited by Al Sarrantonio; Hartwell has a balanced view]

Sarrantonio attempted to overhype Harlan Ellison's overhyped style of introductions for *Dangerous Visions* in his story notes ... People who reviewed the anthology from his story notes tended to dismiss it. People who read the stories know it was undoubtedly the best anthology of the year.

[Swanwick has another anthology pick, this one from the astonishingly fine series edited by the estimable Patrick Nielsen Hayden]

Starlight 3. It had Ted Chiang's "Hell Is the Absence of God," which was a noble failure.

[Whereas for Hartwell]

— I thought it was the best short story of the year, myself.

[Editor Mary Anne Mohanraj of Strange Horizons finally manages to get a word in athwart the (albeit very interesting) Michael and David Show]

How about single-author collections? Kelly Link had a fine one.

[Hartwell has more examples of the talented ol— the talented mature]

Tom Disch came back to the field last year, and some of his stories were among the best of the year. It was like Ursula K. Le Guin's return the previous year. The story "In Xanadu" was very good.

[Mohanraj plugs a book by a friend of mine about which I've raved before]

Beluthahatchie by Andy Duncan was a single-author collection that was just brilliant.

[Hartwell keeps them coming]

Robert Reed had another great year last year, for about the 10th year in a row.

[So does Swanwick]

Someone else who doesn't write much but is great is Geoff Ryman — his story in *[didn't get this — perhaps "Have Not Have" in the current Dozois Year's Best?]* was just amazing. At his best, you can't believe someone writes that well.

[And Hartwell finishes with still other strong contenders; seems the year in short fiction was an exceptionally good one]

I'd like to mention three or four people who wrote their best stories yet last year. Including James van Pelt ... Shane Tourtellotte, who wrote a great story about a man recovering from Alzheimer's *["The Return of Spring"]*... Vernor Vinge, who did "Fast Times at Ridgmont High," in his story collection.

[Van Gelder saves perhaps his best for last]

No one is saying there's a new movement in fantasy, but they're really starting to kick down

the doors. You can have someone like Jeffrey Ford — there's really something going on there.

[Not sure the panel on the Aliens Among Us was thinking of bank machines, but artist/editor Jeanne Gomoll probes the subject]

Our ATM machines are called TYM machines. The first time someone said to me, "I'm going to visit a TYM machine," I said, "What!"

[Patrick O'Leary has become a friend over the con years, the e-mail, and the hours spent enjoying his witty, quirky, beautifully written books; he brought his wise, warm wife Claire to his kaffeeklatsch, and such an intense good time was had by all that I can scarce recall any except the following two fragments]

"The Me After the Rock" is a story commissioned for a new anthology called *Mars Probes*. It's the first time anyone asked me to do that.

... Yes, the Rick Lieder that illustrated *Other Voices, Other Doors* is Kathe Koja's husband. You've got to see his Web site: www.dreampool.com

[At the panel on Someday This Will All Seem Funny, writer James Morrow hopes it's true of his upcoming The Last Witchfinder]

My new novel is about the hilarious subject of burning witches.

[As a moderator, writer John Kessel is Torquemada — in a good way]

I like to start with a personal question, make you squirm ... What's the most embarrassing thing that ever happened to you that you made funny in your writing?

[Morrow cast his net wide]

I make fun of my whole life in my novel *Towing Jehovah*.

[Writer/critic Paul Di Filippo has had some bad rolls]

In my latest, yet-unsold novel, called *Fuzzy Dice*, the protagonist is named Paul Di Filippo, it's in the first person, he's a failed writer, slaving

away in a bookstore. The opening line of the novel is, "My life was fucked."

And it was true.

[Does fine fantasist Jeffrey Ford ever feel like a gigantic vermin?]

In my latest book, one character is a writer with my name. His books don't sell many copies, but all the reviewers mention Kafka.

The writer's neighbor is a retired policeman. One night he points to the blurbs on the back of the book and says: "Look, this Kafka shit is not doing you any favors."

[Kessel tries to come up with a better term than black humor]

Existential dread humor ... dyspollyanna writing — the prime example is, of course, Harlan Ellison.

[The panel discusses examples of books that don't exactly hit the L spot; Ford admits]

War and Peace is not what I would call a laugh a minute.

[De Filippo searches nearer afield]

Dune is pretty humorless —

[Ford agrees]

— Yes, dry as a desert.

[Sometimes Morrow leans on a laugh]

When you're doing a reading at a convention, you feel more secure if you know you have a few jokes coming up. But it's a crutch, really.

[Graham Sleight meets all the most mundane people]

I was in the lift and a woman said to me, "So you must be here for this rider's convention."

[In the panel defending Commodity Fantasy, from the audience writer/scholar Faye Ringel displays impressive knowledge of the 1520 Spanish adventure novel by Garcia Ordonez describing a fabulous Pacific island ruled by Califia, Queen of the Amazon, remember the one? Me neither]

California was named after a floating island in *Las Sergas de Esplandian* —

[An East Coast accent resounds from the audience]

— Which explains a lot!

[Teresa Nielsen Hayden discusses how to spot a book based on a strategy game]

Any book in which, if you look down and stare really hard, you can see the hexes coming out of the page.

[And Ringel thinks some of her colleagues are just too hard on those poor elfboilers]

Most academics don't like to think the universe is very different from the Norton Anthology.

[I know little of the British writer Angela Carter (1940-1992) except that her books The War of Dreams and Nights at the Circus are said to be of high interest to SF/F litterateurs; but writer Elizabeth Hand sure gets the Carter panel off to an attention-getting start]

A man is entering a portal to a new world by coming up between a woman's legs. When you read that as a kid, you think, wow, someone's writing this, this is great and liberating. And it isn't letters to *Penthouse*.

[Author Delia Sherman is less a fan than a subject]

My feeling is that Angela Carter is the queen of interstitial fiction ... It is what it is. You cannot submit it to analysis as a science fiction novel, or any other kind. It subsists entirely on its own logic.

... Those of us in her court are trying to write basically what we write; just as what she wrote is what she wrote.

[Hand speaks to us through the fourth wall]

So much of her work deals with dreams. The same as the stuff with the puppets and the theater: you know, the scrim between this world and another one.

[In the audience, Greer Gilman finds Carter fond of the fringes]

In the deepest, truest sense, her domain is the floating world. The world of outcasts, the world of prostitutes ...

[Chapman thinks our English teachers were wrong]

Her strategy is symbolism, a much misunderstood word. If you can sum up something in 20 words, it isn't a symbol. If you can walk around it and see a number of things that it suggests, *then* it may be a symbol.

[Writer Sarah Smith agrees, and goes further]

— Yes, and she doesn't want you to be comfortable about it or its meaning. Discomfort is her muse, if nothing else.

[Chapman reads several incisive, allusive sentences wherein Carter defines fantasy; fan Julianne Chatelain seems really quite taken with this]

If I want to have that tattooed on my body, what is that from?

[That's OK with Chapman]

— It's from the afterword to *Fireworks*.

[Sherman finishes with two good points]

She's not angry at men, she's angry at what has been made of masculinity.

... Can't finish up this panel without mentioning one more writer in the Angela Carter tradition, Kelly Link. Gotta read *Catskin*. Gotta read *Stranger Things Happen*, whose title is taken from Carter.

[In the panel on the Future of Extrapolation, Glenn Grant looks back ... to now]

The science fiction writers of the past were writing about the era we are now living in.

[Graham Sleight's reference rings a, well, you know]

I think it was Alexander Graham Bell who envisaged a future in which every major American city might have as many as 10 telephones.

[Writer Shane Tourtellotte looks back on some props from a famous flick]

2001— the Pan Am space plane. We do not have space planes, and we do not have Pan Am. This movie also showed picturephones from Ma Bell, and we do not have either of those either.

[Editor Patrick Nielsen Hayden recalls it well]

— 2001 was a terrific movie ... about 1968.

[He thinks it's all almost beside our point]

Science fiction may sometimes stumble onto a genuine extrapolation, but not on purpose. I don't even think that's why people read the stuff. "Oh, let's see what I'll be doing in 2015."

.... Bruce Sterling's *Distraction* is one of the best science fiction novels of our time, and it's full of this stuff. Telephones printed on paper, that people throw away. But I don't think he cares about what really will happen in 2050.

[Grant hopes our future doesn't close Saturday night]

It kind of scares me that the most prescient novels of all are written by satirists. I think Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* might prove to be frighteningly accurate.

[Octavia Butler agrees things work out perversely]

Viewphones. Who would have thought we could have them but we wouldn't want them?

[Nielsen Hayden avers Edison has a lot to answer for]

I think the greatest change in civilization was the electric light. Of course, it screwed up our sleep cycle ...

[From the audience, I make a singular point]

Hard to believe we've reached this point in this panel without mentioning the Singularity.

[But fan Erwin Strauss is not so sure]

— I think that with the dotcom bust some of the bloom may have gone off that rose.

[Nielsen Hayden explains it all for you]

The Singularity is basically the idea that sometime in the next some number of years we will reach a point of technology where, with AI and so on, we cannot look past it because it will literally be out of our hands ... It's a question of whether the future will be human or not.

[Science fact and fiction writer Jeff Hecht says extravagant extrapolation's not just for SF]

Of course, some business plans go up in an infinite curve extrapolating from *one* data point.

[Nielsen Hayden concurs]

— Wasn't Cisco's business plan predicated on the idea that every man, woman, and child on the planet would have five routers?

[Butler brushes all the boys back a bit]

As the only woman up here, this may be a strange question, but I can't help wondering how much of this speculation about a post-human future has to do with men's desire to control reproduction?

[Nielsen Hayden is off-topic, but hey the panel's about over anyway]

Hard science fiction is about guys' attitudinizing each other about libertarian economics.

[At the Readercon Debriefing, Co-Chair Amy West displays a gift for understatement]

First I'd like to thank the committee for putting on the convention at extreme sacrifice to their personal lives.

[Editor Andy Porter airs an early (though hoaxical) gripe]

Could you have better traffic management on Route 95 the Friday starting the convention?

[In response to one complaint, West echoes a basic law of conrunning]

There are very few problems that cannot be fixed by additional signage.

[Organizer B. Diane Martin is pretty proud ...]

We had the most pros ever at a Readercon! Bob Devney, write that down.

[... So am I, as she continues, apparently sincerely]

His column is the first thing we read —

[West brings me back to earth]

— to find out all the things we shouldn't have said.

[Amy West returns to that remarkable ratio]

I believe that our ratio is approximately four readers to one pro — better than any other con. More authors per square inch.

[Organizer Adina Adler quotes some hot numbers]

The warm body count was about 600.

[Andy Porter has one last whinge]

Whenever I went past, the art show was closed. *[Note if you don't know the joke: Readercon hasn't had an art show for at least a decade]*

[After the debriefing, organizer Eric Van, who many long Readercons ago came up with the cool biobibliography format still used to outline panelists' lives and publications, shyly (hah!) confesses a particular favorite]

One of the biobibs I'm proudest of would have to be my own, in the current Souvenir Book. *[He's right, it's very cool: check out pages 69-70 of said pub for this letter-perfect parody of Clute's style from The Encyclopedia of Fantasy]*

[As the con ends, Darcy Devney converses with the woman — you may remember her — who's been wandering around the convention proudly carrying the perfect SF con fashion accessory: a purse covered with numerous little pink nipples]

Excuse me, you must hear this all the time. May I please feel your purse?

Smartness for Dummies

If you have capillaries, prepare to blush them now. A June 19 *Salon* book review by Gavin McNett of Robert J. Sternberg's book *Why Smart People Can Be So Stupid* really hits home when it gets to the chapter by David N. Perkins. To wit:

"Stupidity, for Perkins, is best thought of as a failure of adaptiveness — as 'folly.' ... Perkins lists eight deadly sins of the stupid smart person, which seem to sum it all up rather elegantly: impulsiveness (doing something rash), neglect (ignoring something important), procrastination (actively avoiding something important), vacillation (dithering), backsliding (capitulating to habit), indulgence (allowing oneself to fall into excess), overdoing (like indulgence, but with positive things) and walking the edge (tempting fate)."

Remind you of anyone?

Me too. I got a pointer to the above in a hurry off someone's Weblog, figuring what the hell I could cram it into this ish somehow, but neglected to note the source. Was going to look it up, honest, but kept putting it off. Besides, should I really bother or not? Guess I'll wallow on the couch all weekend as usual instead, inhaling cheese popcorn and finishing 1200 pages of Hugo reading all at once so I can be a responsible member of the Worldcon community. Should I go on or might you become too disenchanted to vote me Best Fan Writer?

To read the *Salon* article before they go out of business, hurry to www.salon.com/books/review/2002/06/19/stupid/index.html

June 2002

To Tony Lewis

Like your dry reprise of Barrie Roberts' *Sherlock Holmes and the Crosby Murder*: "This begins mundanely enough ... with Lestrade bringing the shrunken head of a banker to Baker Street." Mundanity must be more exciting than I remember.

Condolences on being laid off. Happens to the best of us, sometimes over and over. Time now to write that novel? Or tell-all memoir?

To Joe Ross

Amusing account of your Brookline town meeting debate over two proposals for renaming a park, and the eventual compromise: "Judge Henry P. Crowley Park at St. Mark's Square." Trying to imagine how a kid would announce he was going over to play there. How about, "Hey mom, I'm goin over to JHPCPASMS." Or take a leaf from Peter Weiss's 1967 play *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum at Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade* and call it "Crowley/St. Mark's."

To Elisabeth Carey

Thanks for the interesting report on the field trip of your law librarians' association to Concord state prison. Admire your last sentence, about being relieved to return to the dark and the rain ... Not sure from the account *why* you didn't think the trip a good idea beforehand, though.

Unless (cheap shot irresistible here) since you all work for lawyers, you thought to avoid the awkwardness of running into former employers?

To Mark Olson

Not one but two reviews this time of books about language. What a treat! John McWhorter's *The Power of Babel* sounds absolutely marvelous; I've stylused (styled? styed? scribed?) it into my Handspring for future bookshopping.

My experience getting repair service from car dealerships resembles yours, mixed but trending downward. For instance, don't you love their habit of telling you the amount for which to make out the check *before* the receptionist hands over the bill? Once when I demurred, insisted on inspecting the whole complicated document, and deciphered its eldritch runes, turned out "someone hit the wrong key" and a chunk of the

\$800 repair tab for my 4-cylinder Toyota was for not 4 but 24 spark plugs.

To Sheila Perry

Thanks for the introduction to your arkfull of pets.

The reference to "Steinlien's famous cat painting" of course alarmed and intrigued me. Never heard of it, or him. Unless it was a typo? No, think I would have heard if Heinlein were a cat artist as well as a cat lover. (See *The Door Into Summer*, *The Puppet Masters*, etc.) So took a pleasant little Webwander around and found out about Theophile Alexandre Steinlen (1859-1923), and for bonuses Henriette Ronner-Knip (1821-1909) and Sal Meijer (1877-1965) as well. OK, that's enough felinophile art for awhile ... I'm more of a dog man anyway. May your shep/collie/chow Gwynedd long hold her own against age and ill-health.

To Tom Endrey

About your review of the movie *Spider-Man*: you're absolutely right about the spider's crawling away unnoticed after biting Peter Parker thus bestowing on him super Spidey powers. You've read the grammar of film correctly. That shot can have only two intended effects: 1) to make us apprehensive the arachnid will attack somebody else later in this film, or 2) to make us apprehensive it will attack somebody later in some other film. Like perhaps a sequel?

To Paul Giguere

At Readercon this month, which I hope is the last Readercon where we won't be graced by your presence, since next year those distractions your doctorate and your marriage should both be over — hmmm, wait, that second part didn't come out quite right. Start again.

At Readercon, Elisabeth Carey was so kind as to lend me Richard Paul Russo's *Ship of Fools*, which I seem to remember you praised highly some time ago. Actually she kind of pitched it at me in mild disgust and said she wasn't interested in ever having it back. This disparity in your opinions merely heightens my interest. Perhaps by next Boskone, I'll even have had time to read it.