

The 28th Eaton Conference on Science Fiction

University of California at Riverside

May 16-18, 2008

by Larry Niven and John Hertz

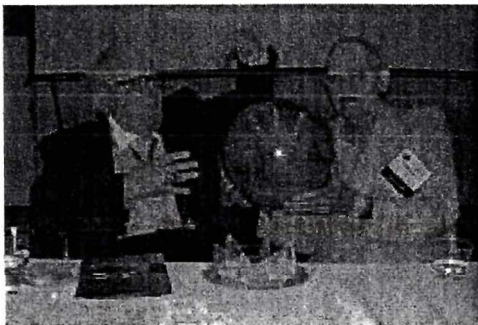
The Eaton Conference has been almost annual since 1979. Organized by the Eaton S-F Collection, on the Riverside campus of the University of California, world's largest publicly accessible holding of sf, including fanzines, the conference has also met in Texas, Washington, Britain, China, and France. Its Website is eatonconference.ucr.edu. This year's topic was "Chronicling Mars." Of your two reporters, Niven was able to attend; Hertz had to ask questions, sometimes of Niven.

About 200 came, triple the usual size. There were more working s-f authors than usual. Another first was an Exhibitors' Hall, with a Mars Rover replica, which roved, and a monolith from the Clarke & Kubrick film *2001*, which drew many to pose for a photo. They may have already been space children. Another was an Illustrators & Matte Artists display (Local 790, Int'l Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees). Another was a reading and open-microphone session with the SF Poetry Association.

Ray Bradbury spoke, and sat on an SF Heritage panel with Fred Pohl, and was given the Eaton Award for Lifetime Achievement in SF, another first. When Dana Gioia, poet, lover of jazz and Shakespeare, and Chair of the National Endowment for the Arts, got wind of that, he got on a plane to introduce Bradbury. Niven and Bradbury met in their doctor's office when Niven was ten. Bradbury gave Niven *The Martian Chronicles*. Later when it was reprinted with a Michael Whelan cover Niven introduced it and Bradbury at Bradbury's high school.

New writers try to imitate Bradbury. It's hard. He's concise. He doesn't tell stories, he sketches them and leaves you to fill them in. His theme at the Conference was love, including sf, and libraries, and loving what you're doing. He remembered looking up to space as a boy and wondering when he could go home. His talk was open to anyone, not just Conference members, at no charge. It drew about 400.

Several presenters were double or triple threats. Greg Benford is an sf author and an astrophysicist at U. Cal. Irvine. David Hartwell is a Tor Books editor and publishes *The New York Review of SF*. Howard Hendrix, an sf author and a published gardener, teaches English at Cal. State U. Fresno, the other California university system; he gave awards



Ray Bradbury and Fred Pohl can still make Mars do tricks.

for the Student SF Short Story Contest. Geoffrey Landis is an sf author with a doctorate in particle physics who works at the NASA John Glenn Research Center. He sat on a Millennial Mars panel with Hartwell and Niven, bravely moderated by Landis' wife Mary Turzillo, another sf author.

Gerry Williams of the San Diego Mars Society hosted "Mars in the Movies," two hours of film clips. That was fun. Eaton reference librarian Gwido Zlatkes led two tours of the Collection in his famous colorful overalls. There must have been a thousand varieties of printing press, including mimeo. Oregon dealer Robert Gavora brought books for autographing, helpfully arranged with placards by authors' names. Benford in a tribute to Sir Arthur Clarke described visiting Clarke in Sri Lanka near the end of Clarke's life. Identical twin brother Jim Benford was at the Conference too.

Niven took notes through the Conference but forgot and left them in Riverside. Someone made the usual reference to C.P. Snow's two cultures. Niven said scientists read as much poetry as others; the two cultures are the one that does both languages and the one that doesn't. There was talk of whether in sf Mars was Heaven. Niven said people who want to design Utopias have been putting them there for a long time. However, Niven wrote *Rainbow Mars*.

The Conference hotel was the Mission Inn. It was sort of a maze, easy to get lost in, but it had lots of places for weddings. The Pournelles get married again every time they find an interesting place to get married in. Think about it.