

YOUR LIFE



Ruth M. Jackson, left, librarian at UC Riverside's Rivera Library, and Melissa Conway, head of special collections, with a display of their prized sci-fi books.

DAVID BAUMAN/THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

'WHO ARE WE? WHO WILL WE BECOME?'

UCR's Eaton conference delves into the philosophy of science fiction

BY PAT O'BRIEN
THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

'Chronicling Mars," the 2008 Eaton Science Fiction Conference at UC Riverside today through Sunday, is a starburst of luminaries: Ray Bradbury, Frederik Pohl, Kim Stanley Robinson, Greg Bear, David Brin, Gregory Benford and Larry Niven.

Bradbury, 87, is author of "The Martian Chronicles," "The Illustrated Man," "Dandelion Wine" and "Fahrenheit 451." His talk, introduced by National Endowment for the Arts chairman Dana Gioia, is free. Seating is limited to the first 500 people in line.

Bear sparred with Jon Stewart on "The Daily Show." Brin's "The Postman" was adapted into a Kevin Costner film, and Pohl has long rattled the status quo with his work.

"I find the academic part fascinating — the conversations, the panels, the interchange. It's funny, it's lively," said Melissa Conway, organizer and head of special collections at UCR. "I'm looking forward to hearing Mr. Bradbury and Mr. Pohl, these grand masters of science fiction talking about what inspired them."

Pohl is the only person to win Hugo awards as both a writer and editor. His "Man Plus" is a tale of an astronaut surgically changed into a cyborg to survive Mars' harsh climate. Pohl's creation becomes more, not less, human as the story evolves. Pohl's wife, editor and retired English professor Elizabeth Hull, will moderate a panel.

"Science fiction is one of the few forms of fiction that people read without having been assigned to it and will likely read after they leave formal schooling," said Hull, one of several participants to talk about the conference by phone or e-mail.

She looks forward to the intellectual stimulation. "At most institutions there is usually only one — or two if the school is on the cutting edge — faculty who teach science fiction," she said.

Professor Eric Rabkin, at the Uni-

versity of Michigan at Ann Arbor, is noted for teaching science fiction, which he defines as fiction that deals with social consequences of science and technology.

"The vast majority of science fiction serves as a kind of warning motivated by the sense that we have to play these things out in our minds in advance," he said. "But science and technology have been going faster and faster and faster, so it becomes ever more important."

Among the speakers is Geoffrey Landis, who has physics and electrical-engineering degrees from MIT, a Ph.D. in solid-state physics from Brown University, works for NASA on Mars missions, and is author of 70 works of short fiction and two books, including "Mars Crossing."

The conference has returned to the university for the first time in 10 years. It was held in 2006 in Seattle and in 2003 in Hong Kong. UCR's Eaton Collection of Science Fiction, Fantasy, Horror and Utopian Literature is the largest such collection in the world.

SPEAKING OUT

Bear spent time at the Jet Propulsion Lab during space missions, spoke to FBI agents about a new view of evolution, and discussed his book "Quantico" on "The Daily Show." He says the reason science-fiction writers get invited to things like that is because they are good at explaining science to the public.

"I'm a radar for the deep structure of science and deep structures of society. Put those two together and you have a story," he said.

His newest book, "City at the End of Time," to be released in August, jumps ahead a hundred trillion years.

"It's quite a romp," he said. "It's hard enough to imagine 20 years from now."

Most modern literature doesn't give the sense of expansion and wonder found in science fiction, he said: "They don't do what Arthur C. Clarke did for me, which was to blow



SPECIAL TO THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

Greg Bear painted this image of author Ray Bradbury, known for "The Martian Chronicles," on Mars.

my head open."

Robinson, a member of the Mars Society, is author of "Red Mars," "Green Mars" and "Blue Mars," as well as a short-story collection, "The Martians."

"When the Mariner and Viking data came back from Mars, I saw from the satellite photos that the landscape was very spectacular and often reminiscent of areas of the American West that I like to spend time in: deserts and the Sierra Nevada mountains above treeline, in particular," Robinson said. "It was a place where I could set stories that embodied all my deepest interests as a writer, including wilderness and new utopian social structures."

Science fiction, he said, gives us a chance to examine what we value and fear.

"As I've been saying for years now, we are all living in a science-fiction novel that we are co-writing together. So now science fiction is the most powerful realism we have," he said.

Brin, who won Hugo and Nebula awards for "The Postman," said, "The most interesting questions are: Who were we? Who are we? Who will we become?"

'CHRONICLING MARS'

2008 Eaton Science Fiction Conference

WHEN: Today through Sunday

WHERE: UC Riverside, the Commons building

COST: \$125 for three days; \$75 per day; \$25 student

FREE EVENTS: Ray Bradbury's talk 4 p.m. Saturday, as well as Mars in the Movies 7 p.m. today and the poetry reading 7 p.m. Saturday.

INFORMATION: 951-827-3233, eatonconference.ucr.edu

SCHEDULE

TODAY: 10 a.m. "Mars From War to War" with Robert Heath, George Slusser, Terry Harpold, Ekaterina Yudina, Mark Bould, Lisa Raphals. 2 p.m. "Martian Ways: Scientific and Mythical Uses of Mars" with Rob Latham, John Huntington, Howard Hendrix, Joseph Miller. 4 p.m. "Fahrenheit 451, The Martian Chronicles and Ray Bradbury's Return to Eden" talk by Eric Rabkin. "A Grand Master Reflects" with Frederik Pohl. 5:10 p.m. panel "Musings on the Science and Fiction of Mars" with Joseph Miller, Greg Bear, Gregory Benford, David Brin. 7 p.m. Mars in the Movies, a lecture with film clips by Gerry Williams.

SATURDAY: 10 a.m. "Post-War and Golden Age Mars" with Elizabeth Hull, Bradford Lyau, Robert Crossley, Dianne Newell, Victoria Lamont, David Clayton. 1:30 p.m. "Ray Bradbury's Mars in Context" with Paul Alkon, David Hartwell, Philip Nichols, Eric Palfreyman. 3 p.m. "Martian Musings" with Kim Stanley Robinson. 4 p.m. Ray Bradbury. 5 p.m. book signing. 5:30 p.m. panel with George Slusser, Ray Bradbury and Frederik Pohl. 6 p.m. book signing. 7 p.m. Science Fiction Poetry Association.

SUNDAY: 10 a.m. "The New Mars" with Jorge Martins Rosa, Sha La Bare, Chris Palmer. 11:15 a.m. awards for student short-story contest. 11:30 a.m. "Millennial Mars: Twenty-First Century Possibilities for Fiction" panel with Mary Turillo, David Hartwell, Geoffrey Landis, Larry Niven