

The edge of reality and beyond

AggieCon31 invades Texas A&M with special guests Harlin Ellison, Terry Pratchett

BY JUAN LOYA
The Battalion

An eclectic collection of activities is approaching Aggieland this week — namely AggieCon31, MSC Cepheid Variable's annual science fiction, fantasy and horror convention.

"We include everything from literature to comic books, television to movies," said Michael Crocker, director of AggieCon and a senior English major.

While last year's convention had media personalities, such as Ted Raimi ("Xena," "Hercules") and Nigel Bennett (*Harrison Bergeron*), as guests, this year's AggieCon has more literary-theme.

The guests of honor include writers Terry Pratchett and Harlin Ellison. Ellison, writer of several award-winning short stories and novels, will be attending AggieCon for the third time.

In addition to the standard discussion and autograph sessions, Ellison will participate in a Texas Cage Match, which varies significantly from the standard question-and-answer session.

"We got the name [Texas Cage Match] of the panel from professional wrestling, which some of my officers are aficionados of," Crocker said.

"The Texas Cage Match is a panel discussion on whatever topic happens to crop up at the time," Crocker said. "It will be styled in such a way that Harlin Ellison will be on the panel for the full time, while the rest of the panel will consist of whatever other guest decides to sit and discuss the topic with him."

"Anyone who watches 'Politically Incorrect' on a regular basis will recognize Harlin Ellison," said Stephanie Smith, public relations director for AggieCon and a recent Texas A&M Graduate. "He's a frequent guest, and they like to invite him back because he's such a forceful personality."

Ellison and Pratchett are two of sci-fi/fantasy's biggest names, and their work is widely read by audiences beyond the genre.

"Harlan Ellison has been called the Lewis Carroll of the 20th century by the *L.A. Post*, and Terry Pratchett was recently revealed [by the British Book Trust] to be the most popular English author ever, rated ahead of [J.R.R.] Tolkien, [Charles] Dickens, and [William] Shakespeare," Crocker said.

In Britain, Pratchett is the decade's best-selling living fiction author, with more than 10.5 million sales during the 1990's. In addition to writing the popular *Discworld* series, he collaborated with award-winning writer Neil Gaiman on the novel *Good Omens*, which is being made into a film by director Terry Gilliam (*12 Monkeys*, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*).

Sci-fi and fantasy artists are also well represented at this year's convention. Among them is Tim Bradstreet, whose work has been seen in comic books such as "Vampire: The Masquerade" and "The Crow: City of Angels."

And as ever, AggieCon offers a wide variety of panels and events to participate in.

"I feel we have at least something for everyone," Crocker said. "We are having a police equipment demonstration on Saturday, a children's reading by one of our guests. Also, many of the panels with our author guests deal with writing fiction [and sometimes non-fiction] in general."

Guest author Thomas W. Knowles, in addition to the writing several western novels, recently wrote *They Rode For The Lone Star*, a book detailing the history of the Texas Rangers. He is participating in three panels, including "Writing as a Career" and "Weird Wild West."

Also on the panel agenda are discussions such as "Star Wars: Same Old Hype?" and "Wicca 101."

Pratchett leads the panel "Humor in Writing" on Friday.

"Terry is known for his humor in his work," Crocker said. "Everything he writes has an almost tongue-in-cheek style to it. He will be discussing how he accomplishes this feel from book to book and has maintained it through over 30 books in publication."

Smith said there have been few changes made to this year's Aggiecon program.

"There are a few more discussion panels than last year, generally Q&A sessions between guests and the audience," Smith said. "In past years we've had large events or demonstrations that took up more time — we held a wedding last year on Friday afternoon — so this year we have a bit more time for our regular panel sessions."

Though there are no vows being exchanged this year, there are still plenty of special events taking place, including a costume contest on Saturday evening, a masquerade ball (with DJ Radio Free Oz) and a Saturday performance of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*.

AggieCon is also sponsoring a charity auction benefiting Scotty's House, a non-profit child advocacy center in Bryan-College Station.

Last year's AggieCon raised more than \$2,100 and the convention's sponsors hope to surpass that amount this year.

AggieCon runs through Sunday, and the events taking place are many. Additional information on the convention is available at <http://cepheid.tamu.edu/aggiecon>.



RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

People in the News

Celine Dion sings at LPGA golf tour

PALM SPRINGS, Calif. (AP) — Celine Dion came out of retirement long enough to sing five songs for fellow golf enthusiasts.

"I'm nervous. I haven't trained," she told about 1,000 people attending a dinner Wednesday night for the LPGA Nabisco Championship tournament. She and husband Rene Angelil played in the event earlier in the day.

Dion's performance at the Palm Springs Convention Center was her first since a farewell concert on New Year's Eve in Montreal. She began a two-year hiatus in January.

Dion, 31, has a new look — a super-short blond haircut. Singing to pre-recorded music, she did a version of Frank Sinatra's "All The Way," with Sinatra's voice accompanying her.



DION

Alex Trebek sued by airline security

TORRANCE, Calif. (AP) — An airline security employee has filed a lawsuit against Alex Trebek over an alleged flap last year at Los Angeles International Airport.

Marlene Andrade, 31, of Hawthorne, claims that the 59-year-old "Jeopardy!" game show host tried to get an oversized bag past her United Airlines security gate last May.

She contends that Trebek became upset when she asked him to put the bag on a conveyor belt that has a metal guard at its mouth to check bag sizes.

Trebek lifted the metal template as if he had the same privileges as airline employees, and slammed it on her hand when she intervened, Andrade said in papers filed Monday in Superior Court.

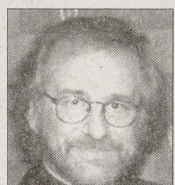
The lawsuit seeks unspecified damages. Trebek had no comment.

Spellberg starts new film Website

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Calling all filmmakers: Steven Spielberg and Ron Howard want to see your work.

The directors are launching a short-film Website this spring called Pop.com and said Wednesday they plan an Internet movie showcase, Popfest.

The films that earn the best grades from Internet users will be reviewed by



SPIELBERG

Pop.com's partners, including Spielberg, his DreamWorks co-founders Jeffrey Katzenberg and David Geffen, Ron Howard and Brian Grazer.

Some of the filmmakers could be offered production deals with DreamWorks, Imagine or Pop.com. Filmmakers can submit movies up to 30 minutes long.

Harrelson denied state court appeal

FRANKFORT, Ky. (AP) — Woody Harrelson's marijuana possession case is back to a county court now after losing a state Supreme Court appeal.

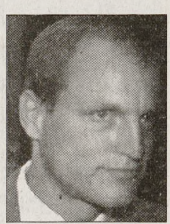
Harrelson planted four hemp seeds in 1996, knowing he would be arrested, so he could challenge a Kentucky law outlawing possession of any part of the cannabis plant.

Through three different courts, Harrelson has argued the statute is unconstitutional because it doesn't distinguish between marijuana and hemp, which contains only minute amounts of THC.

The state's high court ruled Thursday there's no difference between the two. "The mere fact that hemp may contain less THC than marijuana is of no consequence," Justice Donald Wintersheimer wrote.

The misdemeanor carries a potential fine and little possibility for jail time.

Harrelson, 38, has invested in a hemp clothing company and touts hemp's potential for saving trees. He has argued that if paper manufacturers used hemp instead of trees to make paper, there would be no need to cut down the nation's forests.



HARRELSON

REEL CRITIQUE

MOVIE REVIEWS

Romeo Must Die Starring Jet Li and Russell Wong Directed by Andrzej Bartkowiak

While extremely entertaining and packed with amazing action scenes, *Romeo Must Die* falls short of what it could have been — an action classic.

Featuring Hong Kong action sensation Jet Li in his first American, leading role, this movie is full of beautifully choreographed fight scenes. However, the script for this story does not do justice to Li's acting talents.

Han (Li) is an ex-cop who breaks out of a Hong Kong prison when he learns of his brother's death in America. Han travels to America where he finds himself in the middle of a war between his father and a gangster played by Delroy Lindo.

Though the premise has great potential, it is obvious that the screenwriters lost track of the human element of the story by introducing a slew of side stories that go nowhere.

The cinematography by Andrzej Bartkowiak, in his directorial debut, makes the story take a back seat.

Bartkowiak infuses the action scenes with great energy, using rapid-fire editing and a barrage of constantly moving camera shots.

However, having viewed what Li is capable of in some of his Hong Kong films, one almost wishes that



PHOTO COURTESY OF WARNER BROTHERS

Jet Li finds himself outgunned *Romeo Must Die*.

Bartkowiak would have let Li's amazing acrobatics propel the fight scenes rather than relying on flashy camera tricks.

But one camera trick that does work well in the film is similar to the technique used by David O. Russell in *Three Kings*.

In the middle of a fight scene, the picture suddenly cuts to a digital image of a person's skeleton and then shows a bone being broken as it is hit.

Russell did nearly the same thing by showing the bullets actually entering the body and lodging in various organs in *Three Kings*.

In both films, this clever shot heightens the fight's intensity.

One just gets the feeling while

watching this that everyone involved sold the film a little short.

The movie looks great, but rather than being a lean hour and a half, it tries to pretend it has some elements of drama and was stretched out to two hours — making the audience feel that a lot of that time was wasted.

It is obvious that the director and producers intended this to just be an entertaining popcorn-fare, and that is exactly what it is.

The action is fast and furious and there it a lot of it — fights occur about once every 10 minutes or so.

Unfortunately, *Romeo Must Die* teeters on the brink of greatness but falls short of the goal. (Grade: C+)

— Matt McCormick