

TALES FROM TOMORROW: "Dune Roller"
ONE STEP BEYOND: "Reunion"
TWILIGHT ZONE: "Printer's Devil"
OUTER LIMITS: "Demon with a Glass Hand"
THE ALFRED HITCHCOCK HOUR: "Sign of Satan"

THE MT VOID

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We will be showing these in chronological order (as usual). The first is "Dune Roller," a 1951 show based on the short story by Julian C. May, who has recently become much better known for her "Pliocene Saga." "Dune Roller" was her second sale, written just four years after she discovered science fiction, and made a big splash, in part because it was about a then-new science: ecology.

"Reunion," from 1959 is classic O_n_e_S_t_e_p_B_e_y_o_n_d--a reunion of glider pilots doesn't turn out quite as they had planned....

The half-hour T_w_i_l_i_g_h_t_Z_o_n_e episodes have been shown a lot on television, but the hour-long ones (from the fourth season, 1963-1964) are much rarer. So it makes sense to show one of these rarely-seen episodes, and what better one than "Printer's Devil" with Burgess Meredith in an unforgettable performance as the linotype operator who is just what publisher Douglas Winter needs--or is he?

If there is one episode of O_u_t_e_r_L_i_m_i_t_s that everyone remembers, it is "The Demon with a Glass Hand" written by Harlan Ellison. So I guess that means I don't have to describe it! :-)

And finally, we will finish up with an episode of T_h_e_A_l_f_r_e_d_H_i_t_c_h_c_o_c_k_H_o_u_r full of Christopher Lee and satanism (and written by Robert Bloch). And, no, it doesn't have a leg of lamb in it.

2. Well, this week there was an earthquake in the Aleutians. According to the National Bureau of Standards, we lost about a quarter of a second, but there was no permanent damage to the overall structure of time. However, the fact that the earthquake did affect precise timepieces all over the world gives physicists just one more confirmation that Time is an Aleutian.

3. A recent D_e_t_r_o_i_t_F_r_e_e_P_r_e_s_s had an article about a rather interesting sounding restaurant, the Traveler, on the Connecticut-Massachusetts border on I-84. On the restaurant side, dishes mentioned are turkey potpie, charbroiled ham steak, fried clam strips, and quarter-pound burgers. On the book side, every diner gets a free book with their meal. And they get to keep the book.

Marty Doyle, the owner, has been handing out free books for seven years. It started when his wife told him to get rid of some of his own books. By now, he goes to auctions and estate sales to buy enough books to give away over 100,000 per year (50 tons).

There's also a used bookstore in the basement, where books are sold for \$1 to \$5. The restaurant has a full-time librarian, and the waitrons sometimes have to go down and fetch customers whose meals have arrived while they were browsing.

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KINSHIP WITH THE STARS by Poul Anderson
Tor, 1991, ISBN 0-812-51814-4, \$3.99.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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These nine stories from the 1950s and 1960s are not Anderson's best. True, Anderson on an off day is at least as good as many authors on their best day. And you probably already have the best Anderson, given that he (and Harlan Ellison) have collected more Hugos than anyone else (at least in the fiction categories)--seven each. (Interestingly, both have won all of them in the shorter fiction categories. Zelazny and Leiber have won six each--two in novels and four in short fiction.) And Anderson has not lacked for appearances in various anthologies. It's true you probably don't have these, which have been unavailable for years. (I don't think "Uncleftish beholding" was ever widely available.) But I can't really recommend this collection except for die-hard Anderson fans.

The lead novella, "A Bicycle Built for Brew," is about--as the

back blurb reveals--a spaceship powered by beer. My disinterest in beer made me leery of the story, but even teetotalers can enjoy the humorous politicking in the asteroid belt. Harder to enjoy is the blatant sexism of the story. "Inside Straight," which first appeared in the August 1955 M_a_g_a_z_i_n_e_o_f_F_a_n_t_a_s_y_a_n_d_S_c_i_e_n_c_e_F_i_c_t_i_o_n, postulates a society based on gambling (shades of Jorge Luis Borges's "The Lottery of Babylon"). An outsider who sees the custom as a foolish quirk soon learns not to be so hasty in his judgements.

"The Critique of Impure Reason" (November 1962 I_f) was based, according to Anderson, on a cover--and not even a real cover, but a cover invented by his wife one day when Anderson asked her, "Tell me a cover." Her reply inspired this tale of robots, literature, and pulp fiction. "Backwardness" (March 1958 M_a_g_a_z_i_n_e_o_f_F_a_n_t_a_s_y_a_n_d_S_c_i_e_n_c_e_F_i_c_t_i_o_n) takes a quick look at what m_i_g_h_t happen if aliens land.

The first four stories all feature con men, a theme that occurs far more frequently in this volume than in Anderson's writing overall. So it is with some relief that we get a change of pace with "Duel on Syrtis" (March 1953 P_l_a_n_e_t_S_t_o_r_i_e_s), a story as serious as the previous are, if not humorous, at least whimsical. "Duel on Syrtis" is an all-too-possible story of what our contact with aliens c_o_u_l_d be.

The one truly unusual story is "Uncleftish Beholding." It seems to have had limited exposure before this, perhaps because it is hard to classify. Think of it as a science article from a world in which the Norsemen conquered Europe.

"Escape from Orbit" (October 1962 A_m_a_z_i_n_g) returns us to the familiar, this time to the science fiction puzzle story. Even Anderson can't make this tale of astronauts trapped in orbit--and how they inevitably get out--more than average. The problem, of course, is that there's only one unpredictable approach and Tom Godwin used it up years ago (seven years before Anderson wrote this,

to be precise).

Anderson returns to the political theme in "Enough Rope"-- again, predictable, but more entertaining than "Escape from Orbit." And the final story, "The Live Coward" (June 1956 _ A_ s_ t_ o_ u_ n_ d_ i_ n_ g) is more politicking and diplomacy, albeit a bit too neatly wrapped up for my tastes.

Readers should be warned that many of the sensibilities of the stories are of their time. (In plain English, this means that the female characters are often there for decoration only, and their decorative features are dwelt upon at length.) If you can accept that as an artifact of the time these works were written, you might find these stories of some interest. But unless you have exhausted all the better-known Anderson of the period, this is not recommended.

CLOSET LAND

A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: A great idea for a film disappointingly squandered. This is a two-person play about a woman accused of treason and a government interrogator trying to force her to sign a confession. This could have been a powerful statement for Amnesty International, but its special power is lost on far-fetched plot contrivances and misjudgements in atmosphere. It's still worth seeing, though. Rating: 0 (-4 to +4).

Charlie Brown asked it after a particularly bad performance by his baseball team: "How can we lose if we're so sincere?" Sad to say, sincerity is not enough. Radha Bharadwaj wrote the play C_l_o_s_e_t
_L_a_n_d and directed the film with what I am sure was nothing but great sincerity and the best of intentions. And if this film had been done correctly, it would have been a film that is desperately needed with what is a very important message. That message is blunted with what turns out to be a contrived plot and a set of unbelievable circumstances.

In an unnamed country a woman (played by Madelaine Stowe) has been kidnapped and is brought before an interrogator (played by Alan Rickman). At first it appears to have all been a mistake. She is non-political--a simple writer of children's stories. One of the stories, "Closet Land"--still unpublished--has fallen into the hands of the government. They interpret it as a bitter anti-government allegory and now the government wants the woman to sign a confession of sedition. She is put through a mind-numbing succession of mental and physical tortures to debase and humiliate her in an attempt to get her to sign.

So far, so good. If that was all there was to this film it would be a painful film to watch but it would make a powerful statement for Amnesty International, for whose benefit this film seems to have been made. The incident portrayed here could be seen to be in many ways typical of crimes committed by far too many governments today. This view of government political sadism is and should be a bitter pill to swallow. But there is more of a plot to C_l_o_s_e_t
_L_a_n_d than that and there is where the film goes frustratingly wrong, making this incident anything but typical.

When we see the real reasons behind the woman writing her story

"Closet land" and the real motives of the interrogator, both seem extremely contrived and built around an incredible coincidence. The interrogator pulls off a number of odd deceptions; some require

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talents beyond even the capabilities of Rickman to bring off. One doubts that a man as talented as the interrogator would become a government interrogator/torturer. Surely we are not meant to believe most people in this profession are this intelligent. Further undercutting the credibility is the set design of the interrogation center. One suspects in real life such places are at best utilitarian. This chamber, with its fancy furniture, its sound and light equipment, its decorative columns, its functional yet decorative file drawers, creates just the wrong feel.

What is needed is a story that one can tell oneself is being repeated on a daily basis in many countries around the world. Instead, we have a story we doubt could have ever happened. That makes this film a curiosity rather than a powerful statement. I give it a 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.

