



1. Our next book discussion is in Lincroft Wednesday, February 19; Rob Mitchell sends the following blurb:

Location: London, Great Britain. Time: about 15 years in the future. Political situation: a limited, near-miss, nuclear exchange nine years before has nudged Great Britain into a fascist

THE MT VOID

Page 2

government. Parliament has been dissolved, replaced by "the Head," a collection of surveillance and police forces (e.g., the Ear monitors telephone conversations while the Eye uses videocameras to spy on the citizenry "for their own protection."). Most popular culture has been eradicated, replaced by military pomp and official pronouncements. The economy is shattered; a well-off few, while the abused majority lead lives of quiet despair.

Yes, this may sound like a variation of the same themes found in Orwell's 1984, and indeed the background in Alan Moore's V FOR VENDETTA no doubt owes much to the earlier work. But Moore has a different story to tell, and a different medium to tell it in, and therein lies the reasons for discussing his work in the next Lincroft SF meeting.

V FOR VENDETTA consists of two parallel storylines. One thread deals with a man, known only as "V," who decides to strike back and reclaim Britain from the fascists. In some ways he is a superman, physically (but plausibly) athletic, extremely well-versed in literature, history, and music, an expert in psychological and urban warfare, and apparently with access to great wealth. Wearing a Guy Fawkes mask, V initiates his campaign against the Head by blowing up the House of Parliament, on Guy Fawkes Day, of course. Part of this thread shows us the people of the Head; who they are, why and how they run the government, and how their responsibilities and ambitions mesh or clash as they try to track down someone they publically claim is a psychopath, and privately see as a very personal threat to their lives.

The second thread involves a 16-year-old girl, Evey, driven to prostitution by poverty. She is inept enough to proposition as her first customer a member of the Finger's vice squad, but is saved from his brutal response by V. V takes her away, and without

lowering either his literal or figurative masks, tries to spark a love of freedom within her. To her credit (and Moore's!), she is not a perfect student, mindlessly accepting V's political and social agendas. She thinks and questions, and undergoes a spiritual rite of passage as the story progresses.

Told in a graphic ("comic bookish") format, V FOR VENDETTA is considered by some to be the best story ever written in that medium. I'm not sure I agree, but V FOR VENDETTA certainly operates on the same emotional, mental, and artistic levels as Spiegelman's MAUS and Moore's WATCHMEN. A powerful story, visually and verbally, with no easy answers -- this is V FOR VENDETTA. Although the world situation has changed since Moore wrote his story, human nature has not. Moore's observations and conclusions about human weakness and strength are well-taken and relevant to the world today...especially in an election year.... [-jrrt]

THE MT VOID

Page 3

2. The next LeeperHouse fest will again be on a Sunday afternoon. We got a good crown last time . The last fest was a look at the future; the next will be a look at the past and the early days of radio. On Sunday, February 23, at 1 PM, we will take two different looks at the formative days of broadcasting. One is an outstanding documentary about radio; one is a story set in the golden days of radio.

The Wireless Wonder

EMPIRE OF THE AIR: THE MEN WHO MADE RADIO (1991), dir. by Ken Burns  
RADIO DAYS (1987), dir. by Woody Allen

Like most of the country I was very impressed with Ken Burns's long documentary T h e C i v i l W a r. Now he has put the same care and style into the creation of radio and the three men who did the most to make it happen: Lee DeForest, Howard Armstrong, and David Sarnoff. Engrossingly covered are the friendships and feuds among these three men. Burns could probably take the Brooklyn Bridge and make it interesting.

Woody Allen creates a fictional reminiscence of his family and

friends during the early days of radio. Allen intertwines his story with legends and remembrances of 1940s radio. A complete review of \_ R \_ a \_ d \_ i \_ o \_ D \_ a \_ y \_ s is published elsewhere in this issue.

3. Dale Skran writes:

Recently at my instigation, the LeeperHouse Film Festival showed "Bubblegum Crisis" Episodes 1-4. The response was strong, and when Episodes 5-8 are available, I plan on organizing a follow-on event.

Interest has been expressed in ordering information for "Bubblegum Crisis" and other AnimEigo products. Their address is:

AnimEigo, Inc  
P.O. Box 989  
Wilmington, NC 28402-0989  
Phone: 919-799-1501

Their catalog is really rather limited, but appears to be growing. It includes: "Madox-01," "Riding Bean," "Bubblegum Crisis" (8 episodes), "Bubblegum Crash" (3 episodes), "Vampire Princess Miyu" (forthcoming), and a variety of T-shirts, posters, and what-not. They take VISA, etc. All products are subtitled Japanese animation. The subtitling is of good quality, with different speakers in different colors, outlined letters, etc.

So far, I have found them to be reliable in terms of delivery, quality, etc. This is clearly a low-budget operation, supposedly run by animation fans, so I urge you not to run off copies for all your friends. [-dls]

THE MT VOID

Page 4

4. Due to the length of this notice, the results of the time travel contest are postponed until next week. [-ecl]

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Inquiry is human; blind obedience brutal. Truth never  
loses by the one but often suffers by the other.

-- William Penn

GRIFFIN'S EGG by Michael Swanwick  
St. Martin's Press, 1992, ISBN 0-312-06989-8, \$15.95.  
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper  
Copyright 1992 Evelyn C. Leeper

In response to complaints about rising prices for novels-- somewhere around US\$25 for a hardback these days--and also that novels are getting too long and bloated, some publishers are responding by publishing novellas in book form at lower prices. (Pulphouse took this a step further and is doing short stories in paperback at US\$1.95 each.) The first such novella I noticed was T\_h\_e\_H\_e\_m\_i\_n\_g\_w\_a\_y\_H\_o\_a\_x by Joe Haldeman (though it turned out that that had been fleshed out to novel length--about 150 pages, or 45,000 words); now we have G\_r\_i\_f\_f\_i\_n'\_s\_E\_g\_g by Michael Swanwick. How successful this trend will be is unclear. Unit pricing has always been popular with readers; years ago a friend of ours had a "penny-a-page" rule for books which by now must have been modified to at least a penny-and-a-half. Perhaps realizing this, Haldeman said in his acceptance speech for the Hugo for Best Novella for "The Hemingway Hoax" that people had asked if they should buy the novel if they already had the novella and he wanted to assure them that the only difference between the novella version and the novel version was that for the novella version he had cut 15,000-20,000 words of explicit sex from the novel. At any rate, whether US\$16 for a 100-page book will be more acceptable than US\$25 for a 500-page book remains to be seen.

Now admittedly everything I've said so far is crassly commercial and has nothing to do with art or entertainment, which are presumably what books are about. So what about the novella itself? Set on the moon in a future in which mining and manufacturing are carried out on the moon to avoid destroying the earth's ecosphere, it seems to be about how this is destroying the moon. Then a thermonuclear exchange occurs on earth and it seems to be a "how will we survive in isolation" story a la Heinlein. Then it shifts to bio-chemical warfare, mind-altering drugs, .... There is just too much here for a novella--the plots twists are too rapid-fire. It's ironic, but this would have been better as a novel. As a novella, all the good ideas are just too dizzying.

(The title is from a Vachel Lindsay poem quoted before the title page. It is, alas, extremely sexist and its inclusion, coupled with some of the events in the story, gives the story a slant that I suspect Swanwick did not intend.)

## RADIO DAYS

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: Woody Allen recaptures the days of his youth in this comedy about the lives of people he knew and people he heard on the radio. Essentially a plotless reminiscence, it may well be his best work in quite a while.

These days there is no such thing as a typical Woody Allen film. It used to be that you could expect very zany comedy from Allen, then his films took a turn for the introspective, then the serious, then the experimental.  R\_ a\_ d\_ i\_ o\_ D\_ a\_ y\_ s is as close as he has come to zany comedy in quite a while, though if the truth be known it is closer to Jean-Shepherd-style humor than to what we are accustomed to from Allen.  R\_ a\_ d\_ i\_ o\_ D\_ a\_ y\_ s is a nostalgic look at common people and a pop culture during the late Thirties and early Forties. In the world portrayed by Allen there are two classes of people. There are the common people from Allen's Jewish neighborhood and there are the glamorous radio stars whose entertainment is woven into the fabric of everybody's life.

On the whole  R\_ a\_ d\_ i\_ o\_ D\_ a\_ y\_ s, like life, is essentially plotless. It goes nowhere but forward in time. If anything, it is a collection of short stories tied together in a framing sequence that is Allen's life (or Allen's character's life) during this period of time. The stories seem to be gossip legends about radio stars--the sort of thing everybody has heard but no two people have heard exactly the same way. Actually Allen invests very little personality in the radio stars in the stories. When you hear a gossip story, there is very little you learn about the characters of the story themselves than that. On the other hand, the people that the Allen character meets in his daily life are very real and very well fleshed out. They are funny and they are real.

Allen's sets and locales to recreate the feel of the period

were chosen with a certain economy but are nonetheless flawless. We never feel we are looking at a present-day street with a few old cars thrown in to make it look older. The attention to detail on the sets is nearly flawless. The one false note is the repetitive showing of Pepsi-Cola ads and people drinking Pepsi, a move rather more crass than Allen has shown in the past. I personally enjoyed \_ R\_ a\_ d\_ i\_ o\_ D\_ a\_ y\_ s more than the acclaimed *Hannah and Her Sisters*, Allen's previous film. That film was predominantly about sex and relationships. \_ R\_ a\_ d\_ i\_ o\_ D\_ a\_ y\_ s is about common people and their entertainment. Maybe that says something about me. I give \_ R\_ a\_ d\_ i\_ o\_ D\_ a\_ y\_ s a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.