



surface, yes. But not really. The questions "Why are we here?" and "What are we supposed to do?" have haunted humanity for as long as we have been able to ask questions. Many writers--novelists, philosophers and theologians--have examined these questions. For most of us, be we proles or people of destiny, these questions are

THE MT VOID

Page 2

just as difficult to answer as they are to ignore. But, can you imagine what these questions would be like if you were God's ONLY BEGOTTEN DAUGHTER? James Morrow can.

If America were to become a fundamentalist Christian theocracy, James Morrow would be its Salman Rushdie. Not because he is vandalizing the sacred, but because he is asking questions and examining the implications of both the questions and their answers. I suspect that James Morrow is a Jesuit at heart. [-lfl]

2. [I haven't written fiction for a good long while, but this story came to mind inspired by an incident at this year's Boskone that only I noticed.]

If there is one thing I could tell from the start, it was that this guy had done something. He invited Pete, William and me into his rooms. It was one of those old buildings on El Dorado. God, I hate those buildings. They all look like a strong wind would blow them over. They're gray and dark inside. At two in the morning they are all the worse. The only light in the hallway had been coming under his door.

"Sorry to bother you so late, Mr. ... Wilson?" Pete asked.

"Yes, Bill Wilson." His eyes flew from Pete to Willie. "What is it, Officer?"

"Mrs. Lee upstairs she said she heard a shout."

"Uh, that may have been me. Yes, it was me. I had a nightmare. I fancy she can even hear me breathing, eating, ...."

Pete cut him off. "You live here by yourself?"

"Yes. Well, no. Well, you see, my father-in-law lives with me. Well, at least temporarily. But he's not here now."

"You and your father-in-law? No wife?"

"Lenore died four months ago." He was fidgeting and the boards were creaking beneath his feet. "Her father had lived with us. He'd lived with Lenore before we were married and he came to live with us. Such a nice old gentleman." He seemed to be looking around the room again. I could just see a few beads of sweat forming on his forehead. "His eyesight was failing, you see. Blind in one eye. Yes, one eye. But it still seems to look at you. It is all milky white, but it stares like a beam in a lighthouse. Like a beacon." His eyes kept jumping from the floor to Willie to me to the floor to Pete. The veins on his hands

pulsated as he held the arms of his chair. "But he isn't here now. He's away. He has business. Business."

He smiled at me. I tried not to react. If you just wait some of these guys will break themselves.

"Business?" Pete asked. "What kind of business is he in?"

"Oh, uh, investments. I guess I don't really know. He doesn't tell me a lot."

"And he still can travel with his failing eyesight?" The gaslights distorted Wilson's shadow on the wall.

"He has part... partners. They take care of him when he travels."

"Oh, I see," said Pete. Wilson turned that faltering smile on Pete, but Pete did not react. He had an answer for every question, but he stammered more and more and stared at the floor. The minutes passed slowly as Pete asked question after question. Finally Wilson just stared wide-eyed at the floor. Then he was up on his feet. His answers became more and more elaborate. Pete's

questioning seemed to touch a nerve. Wilson began lapsing into incoherence. His words made no sense at all. Then with a shriek he said, "Villains, dissemble no more! I admit the deed!--Tear up the planks!re, here! is the beating of his hideous heart!"

Well, that was it then. We picked up the floorboards and found the old man's body. It probably wasn't there more than a couple of hours. Pete said, "Well, one of us should probably go up and tell Mrs. Lee she was right. Can't blame Wilson for going crazy. The sound of her damn rocking chair was driving me crazy too."

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The question of whether a computer can think is no more interesting than the question of whether a submarine can swim.

-- Edsger W. Dijkstra

FOURTH ANIMATION CELEBRATION  
A film review by Mark R. Leeper  
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It is time again for Expanded Entertainment to send touring around major cities their annual animation celebration. These used to be better than they are now. In large part that is because what used to go into just the Tournee of Animation is now spread over the

annual Tournee, the celebration, and into competing festivals such as the British Animation Explosion. There just isn't enough innovative animation for four new animation anthologies a year. This year's animation was almost entirely traditional flat animation.

Notably missing was clay animation. Also missing was any entry from Pixar with their simulated 3-D animation. (Hey, Craig, if you are reading this, when is Pixar going to get more into story-telling? Is computer animation cost-effective for the sort of story-telling Will Vinton does? I think it is probably pretty tough to create likable characters with computer animation, at least for now.) Also fewer were the number of pieces with an ecology/conservation theme. (This may not be such a bad time to re-evaluate conservation, actually. Fact: carbon dioxide is building in the atmosphere s\_l\_o\_w\_e\_r than we expected. Interpretation: each year nature is becoming more, not less, efficient at converting CO-2 to oxygen. Apparent conclusion: in spite of massive losses at the Amazon, worldwide vegetable biomass is on the increase. Hindsight explanation: excesses of carbon dioxide and nitrogen in the atmosphere are healthy for plant life. If there is an excess, plant life can adjust to take up the slack. This is not confirmed as yet, but there does appear to be more to it than just wishful thinking. Source: Morning Edition, National Public Radio.)

I generally rate the pieces excellent (E), very good (VG), good (G), fair (F), and poor (P). I thought this year there were neither poor films not excellent ones; there was only one fair.

- "Madcap" (Phil Denslow; USA; 2:05): Apparently meaningless gyrating spots and lines are interspersed with title cards containing increasingly weird disclaimers. (G)
- "Canfilm" (Zlatin Radev; Bulgaria; 18:11): The best (and longest) piece of the fest. It took me a little while to figure out what the analogies were in this allegory. We see a country whose citizens are food cans. As we open, the proper contents to have are cherries. Then a new regime comes along that wants all the cans to hold tomatoes. Secret police cans carry off cans of cherries to teach them proper contents. Some very nice ideas. (VG)

- "Dancing" (Bruno Bozzetto; Italy; 2:41): Bozzetto had at the 1991 F e s t i v a l o f A n i m a t i o n a very nice piece on the history of warfare ("Grasshoppers"). This piece is unfortunately a good deal more cryptic. It is an image of a man dancing on a rock and visited by Death. (G)
  
- "The Song of Wolfgang the Intrepid, Destroyer of Dragons" (Mikhail Tumelya; USA?; ?:??): Wolfgang sets off to slay a very large but sleeping dragon. Light and fun. (This and the next two items were not listed in the program, so the country and running times are unknown.) (G)
  
- "A Smaller World" (Corky Quakenbush; USA?; ?:??): A satire on soap operas told with dolls facing life. A doll couple ordering a baby doll from a catalogue discovers it is bigger than either of them. Not as funny as it sounds. (G)
  
- "Buttons" (?; USSR?; ?:??): This piece (as well as the previous two) was not in the program. Nevertheless, it is one of the better pieces. A wealthy official goes through his day oblivious to the fact that every time he pushes a button--like a doorbell or light switch--a bomb detonates somewhere in his city. He ignores the destruction he is causing and continues his life as normal. (The title and all the credits were in untranslated Cyrillic, so the title is more descriptive than accurate.) (VG)
  
- "World Problems" (miscellaneous; miscellaneous; 6:00): Sponsored by American and European MTV. Several international animators do small blackout sketches on the subject of world problems and their solutions. Most popular was about a boy, uncertain if he should recycle paper, being threatened by a militant tree. (?)
  
- "Green Beret" (Stephen Hillenburg; USA; 3:19): A man's house is besieged by a different kind of Green Beret: a cookie-selling Girl Scout. Some of the images are quite funny. (G)
  
- "Weeds" (Thomas Stellmach; Germany; 4:22): In a vast plane tiled over by stone a snail and some plants survive on the last square not yet tiled. Can the snail survive against man's machinery? (G)
  
- "Fantastic Person" (Candy Guard; Great Britain; 3:32): Candy Guard's work is so consistent, there is very little need to see more than one of her animation pieces. Her characters are disenfranchised English women. The title character is currently out of work, but has great plans for the future. She just cannot work up the motivation to get started. (G)

- "The Tale of Nippoless Nippleby" (Keith Alcorn, Paul Claerhout, John Davis; USA; 4:00): This is a variation of the "Ugly Duckling." It is a bit off-color and droll, but it makes its point. (VG)
- "Office Space" (Mike Judge; USA; 1:57): A very short piece about the office nerd upset about the way he is treated and with dreams of quitting. (G)

(Next come three pieces intended as tributes to Tex Avery.)

- "Unsavory Avery" (John Schnall; USA; 2:19): A wolf-like night club singer is obviously considered incredibly sexy by the women in the audience. However, he is not the good catch he appears. While some of the visual gags are borrowed from the Avery cartoons, the art is considerably simpler. I would say the story is not as good as an Avery story either. (G)
- "RRRINGG!" (Paul de Nooijer; The Netherlands; 2:50): Even further from Avery's style, posed with live-action figures (like people) rather than with sketches. I am not really a fan of de Nooijer's animation from previous fests. Again, there are some visual gags borrowed from Avery. (G)
- "Pre-Hysterical Daze" (Gavrilo Gnatovich; USA; 7:23): The best of the three Avery tributes is a caveman being chased by dinosaurs (after a disclaimer saying that the two were not contemporary). There is some fun with the medium. (VG)
- "The Boss" (Alison Snowden, David Fine; UK; 1:32): Ninety-two seconds done by IBM show there are creative ways to solve a problem. This is just a little piece about how someone who liked his job but not his boss got out of his dilemma. Perhaps the fellow the "Office Space" should see this one. (G)
- "The Hunter" (Mikhail Aldashin; USSR; 4:18): Entertaining but not very engaging story of a primitive hunter going after big game. Various absurd ploys of camouflage are used. (G)
- "Quinoscopio" (Juan Padron/Quino; Cuba; 4:40): This is a Cuban

film with a series of blackout-style jokes. None are really hilarious, but many are reasonably witty. (VG)

Overall, this was a very mediocre film festival. If the British Animation Explosion comes your way, that is still the most recommended Festival of Animation in recent memory.

SHELTERED LIVES by Charles Oberndorf  
Bantam Spectra, 1992, ISBN 0-553-29248-X, \$4.99.  
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper  
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This is a story about AIDS.

Oh, it's not called AIDS, but its victims are called "hivers," a clear reference to the HIV virus, and it is transmitted the same way as the HIV virus, and the results are the same. And the victims are being sent to quarantine camps, a "solution" that has been proposed for AIDS victims. (Please, no PC objections--if we can have cancer victims and heart attack victims and stroke victims and flu victims, we can have AIDS victims.)

Unfortunately for the suspension of my disbelief, the societal structure seems to have gone off in a direction quite different than that the quarantine camps would imply. There is some neo-Puritan backlash, but there is also legalized prostitution beyond anything we have today: "companions" available by the hour, the day, or even longer. Even with instant-result blood tests, I'm not sure I find this convincing. Michael Kube-McDowell's Quiet Pools, with its extended marriages giving people multiple partners within a limited, presumably "safe" population, seems more likely. Oberndorf also supposes that same-sex marriages will become legal in most states and relatively common. (Consider how long it took for inter-racial



marriages to become legal, and how much longer it took for them to become even as common as they are today. This novel takes place considerably less than that in the future.) Oh, and in this future would there be monitor cameras everywhere and just about everyone seems to think they're a great idea. All this seems just a bit contrived to me.

Oberndorf tries hard, and writes well, but the whole plot is too predictable and mechanical. Rod Lawrence, professional companion, is hired for a long-term contract by Anna Baxter. Baxter's father's company built the quarantine camps, but Baxter is involved with groups opposing them. Lawrence is under pressure from the government to spy on Baxter, from opposition groups to spy on the authorities, and from his family to give up his sinful life.

But perhaps most irritating is Oberndorf's reluctance to let the work speak for itself. Instead he interjects long philosophical discussions between characters about the morality of the monitors, the camps, and all the other changes, and closes with a long dialogue between Lawrence and the senior Baxter in which Lawrence asks, "It's one hundred years into the future. There has been a cure for ... all disease transmitted sexually. People have discovered how to live sexually free lives without jealousy or guilt. ... A

historian from that period ... looks at Baxter Construction. He looks at the camps your company built... He doesn't believe the inmates did anything wrong. How will that historian portray you?" By presenting this rather unlikely hypothesis as practically a f a i t a c c o m p l i (let's face it, we haven't figure out how to live sexually free lives without jealousy or guilt for the past several years, and disease was only a minor contributing factor, so why will the next hundred years do the trick?), Oberndorf apparently hopes to get the reader to agree with his message, but all it did to me was to annoy me at the lack of subtlety. (One could of course also hypothesize a hundred years in the future historians saying that the camps were the only thing that saved humanity from being wiped out. One can hypothesize anything, and make it sound logical. The trick is to predict what will happen, not hypothesize what might.)

There will undoubtedly be many books whose roots are in the

AIDS plague; one can only hope that some of these will use their material better.

MY TOP TEN FILMS OF 1991  
A film article by Mark R. Leeper  
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This was supposedly a very bad year at the box office. I guess I find that strange, since on the whole I thought we had more good films this year than in most previous years. I don't usually rate five films as +3 (or low +3) in a single year. And the idea that a Sylvester Stallone film would make my top ten list would have been unbelievable at the beginning of the year.

1. **CYRANO DE BERGERAC**: For those unafraid of subtitled films, there is a lot to like in the new film production of **CYRANO DE BERGERAC**. The play is excellent and this is perhaps the best production of the play ever done. Rating: +3. [Technically a 1990 film, this never got a wide release until 1991.]
2. **BARTON FINK**: Very strange but supremely well-crafted film from Joel and Ethan Coen. The Coen Brothers have the best batting average in Hollywood. They have made four films and each of the four is highly recommended. During a bout of writer's block (which they obviously got over) writing **MILLER'S CROSSING** they wrote this strange film about a young playwright facing the same problem in Hollywood. Great performances, great photography, weird film! Rating: +3.
3. **HOMICIDE**: Strange and disturbing thriller about a Jewish policeman torn between two cases. David Mamet's best film so far is one of those films you cannot fairly even give thought to until it is all over. This is one of those films you may spend more time thinking about than you will have spent watching it. Rating: +3.
4. **IRON AND SILK**: Mark Salzman stars in the film based on his autobiographical book about his two years teaching in China in the early 1980s. While the film places too strong an emphasis on his martial arts training, it is a valuable film to help understand what is happening in modern-day China. Rating: low +3.
5. **PROSPERO'S BOOKS**: Peter Greenaway's Christmas package for really jaded fans of fantasy or Shakespeare. This film breaks a lot of rules, but it is still a marvelous and fascinating retelling of **THE TEMPEST** in visionary terms. It may be one of the great fantasy films for just the right audience. Rating: low +3.
6. **SILENCE OF THE LAMBS**: A dark and fascinating thriller that is a genuine departure in the depiction of the psychopathic

killer on the screen. Hannibal Lecter is a screen villain as memorable as Norman Bates. Rating: high +2.

7. THE ROCKETEER: The 1981 graphic novel comes to the screen as what may be the best film ever made based on a comic book. This is a wonderful tying together of odd historical detail in the story of a man who becomes a super-hero with the help of a rocket pack. Rating: high +2.
8. BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: Disney's animated feature films are, in my opinion, over-rated. They lack plot and complexity. Their emotional impact is limited. The usual excuse is that they are only supposed to be simple children's films. BEAUTY AND THE BEAST demonstrates that a lot more can be done in this medium. It beats BAMBI, CINDERELLA, SNOW WHITE, SLEEPING BEAUTY, and all of the other classics, including FANTASIA. Parents should go with their kids. If you don't have kids, go anyway. This one may not be on cassette this century. Rating: +2.
9. OSCAR: A delightful surprise. OSCAR is a throwback to manic screwball comedies of the 1930s that takes chances and then makes them work. Undemanding as a star vehicle for Sly Stallone, OSCAR is packed with eccentric weirdos, funny hoods, and lots of nutty dialogue. It has been a good long time since I laughed so much at a comedy. Rating: +2.
10. OBJECT OF BEAUTY: A well-crafted comedy with some nice dramatic moments and some serious things to say. This story is of the theft of a valuable piece of art from a spendthrift American couple living in London. The story touches a broad range of emotions with some of the minor characters more interesting than the main ones. Rating: +2.

