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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society  
Club Notice - 09/18/92 -- Vol. 11, No. 12

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are on Wednesdays at noon.

D A T E                  T O P I C

- 10/07 HO: THE FORGE OF GOD and THE ANVIL OF STARS by Greg Bear  
          (The Fermi Paradox) (HO 4N-509)  
10/28 HO: Book Swap (HO 4N-509)  
11/18 HO: DOOMSDAY BOOK by Connie Willis (Plagues) (HO 4N-509)  
12/09 HO: A FIRE ON THE DEEP by Vernor Vinge (HO 4N-509)

D A T E                  E X T E R N A L M E E T I N G S / C O N V E N T I O N S / E T C .

- 09/19 NJSFS: New Jersey Science Fiction Society: TBA  
          (phone 201-432-5965 for details) (Saturday)  
10/10 SFABC: Science Fiction Association of Bergen County: TBA  
          (phone 201-933-2724 for details) (Saturday)

HO Chair:   John Jetzt      HO 1E-525 908-834-1563 hocpb!jetzt  
LZ Chair:   Rob Mitchell     HO 1D-505A 908-834-1267 hocpb!jrvt  
MT Chair:   Mark Leeper      MT 3D-441 908-957-5619 mtgzy!leeper  
HO Librarian: Nick Sauer   HO 4F-427 908-949-7076 homxc!11366ns  
LZ Librarian: Lance Larsen   LZ 3L-312 908-576-3346 mtfme!lfl  
MT Librarian: Mark Leeper   MT 3D-441 908-957-5619 mtgzy!leeper  
Factotum:   Evelyn Leeper   MT 1F-329 908-957-2070 mtgzy!ecl  
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1. Sorry, you are an instant loser, but thank you for playing.
2. Two weeks ago I was talking about the little stickers you get when you give blood. You know the ones. They say, "Be nice to me, I gave blood today. Tomorrow all bets are off." I should tell you about what happened to me with those stickers. One of my trips was to Peru and Ecuador. That was the trip where I was nearly arrested by the military police, I got stranded on the Amazon, I wrestled a pickpocket, and I had my luggage disappear on the way back (that is

all true, by the way--it was s\_o\_m\_e trip!), but the worst thing that happened was to come when I got what I thought was safely back and a few weeks later I went to give blood.

I filled out the form before giving and they asked if I'd traveled to a malaria region. Yes, I told them. Did I take anti-malaria drugs? Sure--how dumb do I look? Don't answer that. Sorry, we don't want your blood. Really? It's the rules. But they gave me a "Be nice to me, I tried to give blood today" sticker. And what was worse, I was dumb enough to wear it.

Then it started. "Hey, you see what Leeper is wearing?" "Yeah. Why do you think he got rejected?" "Well, it sure wasn't for low blood pressure." "You think he has ... IT?" "Why else would he get rejected?" "Boy, he's the last person I would have thought of as ...." "I don't know; there was always something different about him, a little weird. It's not just that he didn't divorce her years ago. There's something funny about a grown man who still reads sci-fi."

3. And the Hugo winners are:

Best Novel:: Lois McMaster Bujold, B\_a\_r\_r\_a\_y\_a\_r (Baen)

Best Novella: Nancy Kress, "Beggars in Spain," IASFM, April 1991

Best Novelette: Isaac Asimov, "Gold," A\_n\_a\_l\_o\_g, September 1991

Best Short Story: Geoffrey A. Landis, "A Walk in the Sun," IASFM, October 1991

Best Non-Fiction Book: Charles Addams, T\_h\_e\_W\_o\_r\_l\_d\_o\_f\_C\_h\_a\_r\_l\_e\_s\_A\_d\_d\_a\_m\_s

Best Original Artwork: Michael Whelan, cover of T\_h\_e\_S\_u\_m\_m\_e\_r\_Q\_u\_e\_e\_n

Best Dramatic Presentation: T\_e\_r\_m\_i\_n\_a\_t\_o\_r\_2 (Carolco)

Best Professional Editor: Gardner Dozois

Best Professional Artist: Michael Whelan

Best Fanzine: Mimosa, Dick and Nicki Lynch

Best Semiprozine: Locus, Charles Brown

Best Fan Writer: Dave Langford

Best Fan Artist: Brad Foster

John W. Campbell Award: Ted Chiang

Mark Leeper  
MT 3D-441 908-957-5619  
...mtgzy!leeper

Discovery consists of seeing what everyone else has seen  
and thinking what no one else has thought.  
-- Albert Szent-Gyorgi

(So does letting your mind wander!  
-- Mark Leeper)

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN, VOLUME 4: ALTERNATE AMERICAS  
edited by Gregory Benford & Martin H. Greenberg  
Bantam Spectra, 1992, ISBN 0-553-29007-X, \$4.99.  
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper  
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This anthology contains "fourteen tales of alternate history" according to the cover blurb, though by the strict definition of "alternate history" two or three of these stories are not really alternate histories. (That's okay--in fact, I think two of these are among the three best stories in the volume--but I thought you should know.)

It was, of course, inevitable that an anthology of alternate Americas would appear in October of 1992. After all, alternate histories are all the rage now and everyone is getting on the Columbus band wagon (except for those who are trying to overturn it for being more a war wagon or a slave wagon than a band wagon), so an alternate Americas anthology was hardly unexpected. Unfortunately, the apparent constraint of choosing only new stories

for this volume meant that some of the classic alternate Americas were left out (such as L. Sprague de Camp's "Wheels of If" and Harry Turtledove's sequel "The Pugnacious Peacemaker," Joe Lansdale's "Letter from the South Two Moons West of Nacogdoches" and "Trains Not Taken," Somtow Sucharitkul's "Aquilid" stories, or even Philip Jose Farmer's "Sail On, Sail On"--a longer list appears at the end of this review). But the long lead time meant that half the stories have already seen print elsewhere anyway by the time this book came out. The worst of both worlds.

Harry Turtledove's "Report of the Special Committee on the Quality of Life" is the exception to this, having appeared in Terry Carr's U\_n\_i\_v\_e\_r\_s\_e\_1\_0 in 1980 (under the byline "Eric G. Iverson"). I can't see any change that would warrant the 1992 copyright date indicated for it in W\_h\_a\_t\_M\_i\_g\_h\_t\_H\_a\_v\_e\_B\_e\_e\_n\_4--the only differences I found were one extra paragraph break and one change in capitalization. It's also not, strictly speaking, alternate history. Rather, it's a parody of government feasibility studies by having Jaime Nose'nada ("I know nothing" in Spanish) write up all the reasons why Spain shouldn't bother to follow up on Columbus's journey. Cute, but more than a little preachy--I'm sure all the pro-space groups love it.

"Ink from the New Moon" by A. A. Attanasio is the first of three stories in this volume which assume that North America was first settled from Asia rather than from Europe. What could have been a good story is undercut by Attanasio's foray into a description of the "Unified Sandalwood Autocracies" which sounds, not surprisingly, like our own USA. Maybe the point is that the

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more things change, the more they stay the same, but it ends up looking contrived instead of convincing. And I feel obliged to point out a minor quibble: The Chinese load Columbus's ships with tobacco, peanuts, and potatoes. But peanuts and potatoes are native to South America--peanuts were introduced to Africa by European explorers and reached North America with the slave trade; potatoes were brought to Europe from South America and from there to North America. I suppose it's remotely possible that peanuts would have arrived in the "USA" of Attanasio's story through trade, although Attanasio has said there was a huge wall separating the "USA" from

the Aztec empire. The quibble and the parallels are really the same thing--an attempt to make the alternate world look familiar. But by making it familiar, Attanasio has made it less realistic.

"Vinland the Dream" by Kim Stanley Robinson is not an alternate history in the strict sense of the word--it's about remaking history, all right, but not by taking a time machine and going back to change something. Rather, Robinson asks, what if all the evidence of Norse exploration in Canada and elsewhere in North America had been faked by someone in the early 1800s? What if he h a d "remade history" (a common theme with Robinson, whose latest collection is titled R\_e\_m\_a\_k\_i\_n\_g\_H\_i\_s\_t\_o\_r\_y after its title story)? In "Vinland the Dream" some archaeologists discover the truth, making them sort of Schliemanns in reverse, turning fact into myth. What motive would the hoaxer have? Was he just a practical joker or a Norse chauvinist, or was he trying to give us dreams? In both "Vinland the Dream" and "Remaking History" (which examines an alternate history on many levels: what did happen, what might have happened, how what happened is portrayed in the media, and so on) Robinson looks at how our perceptions of history give direction to our lives.

"If There Be Cause" by Sheila Finch assumes that Sir Francis Drake actually settled New Albion (San Francisco) instead of just claiming it and moving on, or if he didn't settle, at least he and his crew stayed long enough to leave a lasting impression and a lot of descendents. Finch does the politically correct thing by having the Native Americans ("The People") the heroes and the Europeans the villains, except for Drake (who probably wasn't the saint the People remember him as) and, while the characters are well-drawn, the somewhat heavy-handed message is annoying.

James Morrow's "Isabella of Castile Answers Her Mail" is not an alternate history, though a world in which Isabella and Columbus could exchange mail as he was sailing across the Atlantic is clearly not o\_u\_r world. (One can also argue that in our world Isabella wouldn't have talked about the "Golem of Jewish folklore," which was known only to a few scholars until the 16th Century in Prague.) But the main thrust of the story is that Columbus passes through a time warp and visits modern-day New York. And what he finds most surprising is, ....., well, surprising. The reaction of someone from

the past to our present is a staple of science fiction, but Morrow manages to make it fresh and new. Maybe I'm just an incurable Morrow fan, but maybe that's because his work is so good.

"Let Time Shape" is another of George Zebrowski's "climetricon" stories, the climetricon being a device that lets one see all possible outcomes of history. This one concentrates on a single timeline--what if the survivors of Carthage had crossed the Atlantic and settled North America--rather than examine several lines as some of his others do. The interjections of climetricon theory add little to the story and make the narrative seem somewhat choppy. Also, I find the idea that New Carthage would be so advanced and in a secret alliance with England without Spain knowing anything about its existence hard to believe.

Jerry Oltion's "Red Alert" is little more than an aerial dogfight story with an alternate history framework--the Native Americans successfully resisted the European's attempts to steal their land (even Cortez was defeated by the Aztecs) and are limited to Manhattan Island, the only land they actually bought. Other than this, and Oltion's use of names such as Sitting Bull and Tecumseh for characters, this could be any dogfight story anywhere.

"Such a Deal" by Esther M. Friesner looks at what might have happened if Columbus had been turned down by Ferdinand and Isabella and had gotten his financing from the Jews of Granada instead. It's more a tale of alternate Spain than alternate America (though Columbus seems to have gone a lot further on his first voyage here than his first voyage in our world), and entertaining enough. Unfortunately, it ends on a word play in English which would not work at all in either the Spanish or Ladino in which it was presumably related, nor the "Cathayan" in which it was used--an odd slip, since Friesner's last alternate history centered around the ambiguities of translation.

Robert Silverberg can always be relied on to produce a first-class story, and "Looking for the Fountain" maintains that reputation. The narrator tells of traveling with Ponce de Leon to look for the Fountain of Manly Strength, commonly--and erroneously--called the Fountain of Youth. On their quest they find a tribe of Latin-speaking Christian Indians. How such a thing came to be I will leave for Silverberg to explain. I will say that this is a genuine alternate history and not just a secret history or lost race story, but its main virtue is Silverberg's skillful use of the theme of "recovering what one has lost" on several different levels. As with Robinson's "Vinland the Dream," "Looking for the Fountain" bears multiple readings.

"The Round-Eyed Barbarians" by L. Sprague de Camp is another "what if the Chinese had settled North America first" story. (As a side note, all these alternate Americas are alternate North

Americas. It's a bit disappointing that no one did anything with South America.) Once again the Chinese settlers meet the European explorers. Ho hum. The story is competent, but mundane.

Brad Linaweaver's "Destination Indies," on the other hand, is far from mundane. So far, in fact, that one wonders what he was thinking of when he wrote it. (My suspicion is that he was inspired by some of Howard Waldrop's stories.) This is chapter 107 of the on-going saga of Christopher Columbus sailing the Atlantic and fighting the Dark Duke, agent of the Turks and builder of a microdemonically engineered submersible.... Not my cup of tea, but fans of old pulps and serials may enjoy it.

In "Ship Full of Jews," Barry N. Malzberg supposes that Torquemada has convinced Columbus to carry a large contingent of Jews to the New World for his (Torquemada's) own secret purpose. Malzberg does a fair job of drawing his characters, but his errors and slips made the story hard to appreciate or even accept. First, he refers to the Jews as Chassids and describes their style of clothing in such a way as to be consistent with the Chassidim, but Chassidism wasn't founded until the 18th Century (and then in Poland rather than anywhere near Spain). Second, everyone talks about going to the "New World." But Columbus thought he was sailing to the East Indies and China, \_ n \_ o \_ t a "New World," and in fact died not knowing he had found a new continent. And third, when I'm reading along and hit the phrase "between she and Cristoforo," it's like hitting a protruding stone while skating across an apparently smooth pond. Benford, Greenberg, and how many other editors let this past them? "Ship Full of Jews" has that dark Malzberg tone that he does so well, but I found too many stumbling blocks to rate it as highly as some of his past works.

"The Karamazov Caper" by Gordon Eklund starts from the premise that Pope Innocent VIII was assassinated in 1486 and his successor was more interested in purifying the Church than in exploring the lands Columbus discovered. The result of this is that North America was settled from the west by the Russians and from the east by the Germans. When the story starts, the baby son of the German ambassador has been kidnapped and killed in Russian territory and the investigator Trotsky has been sent to find the murderer. And

therein lies the rub, as they say--I can't believe that Lenin and Trotsky and Czar Nicholas II would even exist, let alone fill the same roles in this world as in ours. (For example, without an imperialist Spain, would Henry VIII have felt the need to marry Catherine of Aragon? If he hadn't married her, he wouldn't have had to divorce her, so England's break from the Catholic Church might never have occurred, or might have occurred later. And so on.)

And finally "The Sleeping Serpent" by Pamela Sargent, in which the Mongols were not stopped in their expansion and swept through most of Europe and across the Atlantic. Only a few English

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settlements along the New England coast are causing them problems and they know how to deal with them--they think. In many ways similar to "If There Be Cause," this story deals more realistically with the philosophies of the various groups involved and avoids the obvious traps.

Though there are some outstanding stories in this collection, such as the Robinson and the Silverberg, overall I was disappointed by it. Granted, it's 1992. Still, these are supposed to be alternate Americas, so having five of the fourteen about Columbus's journey seems excessive. Four more deal with settlement from Asia. Strangely, only one did anything with the Vikings, and no one had anything to say about Central or South America. This collection is not up to the level of the previous three in the series, and not up to the level of Mike Resnick's "Alternate" series from Tor. Recommended for completists only.

#### Further Reading:

- Anvil, Christopher, "Apron Chains," in   A  n  a  l  o  g Dec 70: The scientific revolution arrived early and the discovery of the Americas is sidetracked by a NASA-like project, while Mexicans plan an expedition of discovery east across the Atlantic.

- Benford, Gregory, "Manassas, Again," in   W  h  a  t  M  i  g  h  t  H  a  v  e  B  e  e  n  3: Rome developed a steam-driven machine gun and colonized the New World.

- Coulson, Juanita, "Unscheduled Flight," in   B  e  y  o  n  d  T  i  m  e: The



Bermuda Triangle offers a one-way trip to an America colonized by Vikings and English pirates.

- Coulson, Robert, "Soy la Libertad!," in B\_e\_y\_o\_n\_d\_T\_i\_m\_e: Magellan discovered the Americas.
- Cox, Irving E., Jr., "In the Circle of Nowhere," in U\_n\_i\_v\_e\_r\_s\_e Jul 54 and F\_a\_n\_t\_a\_s\_t\_i\_c Jan 60: AmerInds enslaved Europe.
- de Camp, L. Sprague, "The Wheels of If," in Tor SF Double #20: Celts settled North America.
- Effinger, Geo. Alec, R\_e\_l\_a\_t\_i\_v\_e\_s: Has one world in which Europe never colonized America or Africa.
- Eklund, Gordon, "Red Skins," in F&S Jan 81: The Americas were discovered in 1219 by a Moslem, but not seriously colonized until Europeans showed up c. 1700.
- Eklund, Gordon, "The Rising of the Sun," in B\_e\_y\_o\_n\_d\_T\_i\_m\_e: Europe fell to the Moslems and was discovered by the Incas in 1600.
- Farmer, Philip Jose, "Sail On, Sail On," in T\_h\_e\_G\_r\_e\_a\_t\_S\_F S\_t\_o\_r\_i\_e\_s: 1\_4(1\_9\_5\_2): Columbus sails off the edge of the Earth.
- Lansdale, Joe R., "Letter from the South Two Moons West of Nacogdoches," in B\_y\_B\_i\_z\_a\_r\_r\_e\_H\_a\_n\_d\_s: North America was settled by the Japanese, Aztecs and various tribes.
- Lansdale, Joe R., "Trains Not Taken," in B\_y\_B\_i\_z\_a\_r\_r\_e\_H\_a\_n\_d\_s: Japan colonized the western part of North America and Europe the east.
- Norton, Andre, Q\_u\_e\_s\_t\_C\_r\_o\_s\_s\_t\_i\_m\_e: Cortez's death prevented the

Spanish conquest of the Aztecs.

- Ryan, J. B., "The Mosaic," in A\_s\_t\_o\_u\_n\_d\_i\_n\_g Jul 40: A different outcome at Tours results in an Arabic America.
- Saberhagen, Fred, T\_h\_e\_M\_a\_s\_k\_o\_f\_t\_h\_e\_S\_u\_n: An Inca Empire in a timeline that had defeated the Spanish conquests recruits soldiers from other time periods to stop the Spanish conquests in yet other timelines.
- Silverberg, Robert, T\_h\_e\_G\_a\_t\_e\_o\_f\_W\_o\_r\_l\_d\_s: Europe was practically wiped out by the Black Plague in 1348, and North America was conquered by the Aztecs.
- Smith, L. Neil, T\_h\_e\_C\_r\_y\_s\_t\_a\_l\_E\_m\_p\_i\_r\_e: Europe was destroyed in 1349 when an attempt to ship plague-ridden rats to Saracen

lands backfired disastrously, and the Western Hemisphere is ruled by the secretive, mysterious Aztec empire.

- Somtow, S. P., *The Aqulid* (a.k.a. *Aquiland* in the New World),

*The Aquiland I I: Aquiland and the Iron Horse*, and *The Aquiland I I I: Aquiland and the Sphinx*: Romans discovered the steam engine

and conquered the world, including Terra Novum.

- Somtow, S. P., "Sunsteps," in *Fire from the Wine Dark Sea*:

Aztecs depopulate the world in order to meet sacrificial needs.

- Turtledove, Harry, "The Pugnacious Peacemaker," in *Tor SF Double #20: Celts settled North America*.

- Waldrop, Howard, "The Lions are Asleep This Night," in *Omni* Aug 86: Columbus found the Americas uninhabited; African slaves were imported to mine Peruvian gold but rebelled, leading to white decline worldwide.

- Waldrop, Howard, *The M Bones*: In one world, there was no Roman Empire, no Christianity, the Arabs have explored the New World, and the Aztecs are still powerful.

- Weissman, Barry Alan, "Past Touch-the-Sky Mountain," in *I* f May 68: Marco Polo discovers America for the Chinese.

- White, James, *The Silent Stars* *Go By*: The Irish have

discovered and settled North America in (relative) peace with the original inhabitants.

- Yarbro, Chelsea Quinn, "An Exaltation of Spiders," in *Beeyond* *the Gate of World*: Europe was practically wiped out by the Black Plague in 1348, and South America continued to be ruled by the Incas.

(Thanks to Robert Schmunk for maintaining the list from which these entries were taken.)