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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society  
 Club Notice - 02/12/93 -- Vol. 11, No. 33

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are in Holmdel 4N-509  
 Wednesdays at noon.

D A T E                      T O P I C

- 02/17 ENTOVERSE by James P. Hogan (Fantasy Written as Hard SF)
- 03/10 WEST OF EDEN by Harry Harrison (Primitive Humans Vs. Alternately-Evolved Bio-Tech-Advanced Reptiles)
- 03/31 STEEL BEACH by John Varley (Near-Future Uptopias-- Or Are They?)
- 03/31 Deadline for Hugo Nominations
- 04/21 ARISTOI by Walter Jon Williams (If This--AI, Virtual Reality, Nanotech--Goes On)
- 05/12 THOMAS THE RHYMER by Ellen Kushner (Fantasy in a Modern Vein)
- 06/02 WORLD AT THE END OF TIME by Frederik Pohl (Modern Stapledonian Fiction)
- 06/23 CONSIDER PHLEBAS by Iain Banks (Space Opera with a Knife Twist)
- 07/14 SIGHT OF PROTEUS by Charles Sheffield (Human Metamorphosis)

Outside events:  
 The Science Fiction Association of Bergen County meets on the second Saturday of every month in Upper Saddle River; call 201-933-2724 for details. The New Jersey Science Fiction Society meets on the third Saturday of every month in Belleville; call 201-432-5965 for details.

- HO Chair: John Jetzt HO 1E-525 908-834-1563 hocpb!jetzt
  - LZ Chair: Rob Mitchell HO 1D-505A 908-834-1267 hocpb!jrtr
  - MT Chair: Mark Leeper MT 3D-441 908-957-5619 mtgzfs3!leeper
  - HO Librarian: Nick Sauer HO 4F-427 908-949-7076 homxc!11366ns
  - LZ Librarian: Lance Larsen LZ 3L-312 908-576-3346 quartet!lfl
  - MT Librarian: Mark Leeper MT 3D-441 908-957-5619 mtgzfs3!leeper
  - Factotum: Evelyn Leeper MT 1F-329 908-957-2070 mtgzy!ecl
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1. For our next discussion, on February 17 in Holmdel, Rob Mitchell says:

THE MT VOID

Page 2

James Hogan's E\_n\_t\_o\_v\_e\_r\_s\_e, the fourth book in his Giants series, is a classic hard-science SF novel in the spirit of Smith's V\_e\_n\_u\_s E\_q\_u\_i\_l\_a\_t\_e\_r\_a\_l, Clement's M\_i\_s\_s\_i\_o\_n\_o\_f\_G\_r\_a\_v\_i\_t\_y, or even any of Clancy's techno-thrillers. Ideas are the main attractions in these books. The plot in E\_n\_t\_o\_v\_e\_r\_s\_e is tightly-written, with suspenseful twists and several points where I stopped reading to say, "Wow! What a clever idea!" The characterization is rice pudding without cinnamon -- bland, semi-solid in spots, but not memorable.

The Giants series postulates that millions of years ago, tall but gentle aliens (the Giants) lived in the Solar System and engaged in genetic engineering experiments. Humanity's ancestors were one result of those experiments, but our forebears destroyed their planet in a war and had to be relocated by the Giants. One side was brought to Earth and reverted to barbarism, the other was brought by the Giants to a distant planet called Jevlen. All this was brought out in the previous Giants books, in large part due to the efforts of Dr. Victor Hunt, a scientist with the United Nations' Space Arm (UNSA) who is a major point of contact between the Giants and humanity. A short prologue recaps this history.

In E\_n\_t\_o\_v\_e\_r\_s\_e, we learn that Jevlenese society has become increasingly decadent and dependent on JEVEX, an immense supercomputer that managed all Jevlen affairs. The two-dimensionally quiet and rational Giants (more properly called Thuriens) then shut JEVEX down, but were distressed when Jevlenese society deteriorated further. The Thuriens come to Earth to seek advice on how to deal with the Jevlenese problem, since the Jevlenese are biologically identical to Earth's humans and presumably almost psychologically identical.

While all this is going on, an apparently unrelated story is interwoven between the scenes on Earth and Jevlen. In this story, entities (humans? can't tell...) live in a universe of magic, where

literally nothing is predictable, but where stars seemed to be dying and new gods were coming to power. Hogan takes his time integrating this story thread into the overall plot line, but patience is rewarded when the reader says, "Aha! So *\*that's\** it! What a great idea, and it makes sense!" E\_n\_t\_o\_v\_e\_r\_s\_e is in part a mystery novel, and Hogan plays fair with the reader and delivers a solution worthy of his set-up. In addition, Hogan's admiration of technology does not blind him to the fact that technology sometimes fails, and always can be subject to abuse.

I was delighted by the ideas in the book, and the excellent skill with which Hogan told his story. The pages turned effortlessly as I devoured each plot hook and eagerly anticipated the next. This was a fun book, and I recommend it on that basis. It's not a Hugo nominee, though, since the characters are generally cardboard. The aliens are basically Friendly Intellectuals Without a Clue, the villains are almost stereotypes, and the main characters such as

THE MT VOID

Page 3

Dr. Hunt are simplistically intellectual and heroic. Nonetheless, for the story Hogan wishes to tell, the characters do the job.

I'm quite fond of Hogan's work in general, especially proto-classics like C\_o\_d\_e\_o\_f\_t\_h\_e\_L\_i\_f\_e\_m\_a\_k\_e\_r and I\_n\_h\_e\_r\_i\_t\_t\_h\_e\_S\_t\_a\_r\_s (the first Giants book). E\_n\_t\_o\_v\_e\_r\_s\_e is a worthy successor to those works, and I look forward to re-reading it.

2. Okay, science fans, we have an interesting phenomenon to call to your attention. Those of you who are extremely alert will have noticed that the last two issues were both called Volume 11, Number 31. The current issue is number 33. The volume corresponds to the year of publication and the number to which week in the year we are publishing. In actual fact, when Volume 10, Number 33, came out, the Earth was in roughly the same place in its orbit around the sun as it is now. The number actually tells you where in the orbit around the sun the Earth actually is. Whenever the number on the issue is 33, the Earth is just about at the same point in its orbit.

Now, what happened last week is a very unusual celestial phenomenon. You see, the orbit is nearly, but not quite, perfect.

Due in part to a recalibration of the intervals to compensate for the leap year February last year and due to uneven gravitational influences on the movement of the Earth in its orbit, the Earth actually spent just the slightest touch more than a week in orbit interval number 31. It was at one end of the interval one Friday and at the other end the next Friday. Now this Friday the Earth is just at the beginning of the 33rd interval. This means that there were two different issues Volume 11, Number 31, and no Volume 11, Number 32.

If all this bothers you, don't worry about it. I am reliably informed that the next similar orbital anomaly will be in the year 2067. By then I hope to have a more reliable mechanism for numbering issues, assuming I am still editor. Ideally this should never have happened, but once again the real world has fallen short of my high standards. One more screw-up like this and I will start looking for a replacement world.

Mark Leeper  
MT 3D-441 908-957-5619  
...mtgzfs3!leeper

Transportation is the action of intentionally creating an artificial scarcity of yourself in one location while simultaneously creating an artificial excess of yourself in another.

--Mark Leeper

ARISTOI by Walter Jon Williams  
Tor, 1992, ISBN 0-312-85172-3, \$22.95.  
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper  
Copyright 1993 Evelyn C. Leeper

The Aristoi are the technocrats of Earth-2 (Earth-1 having been destroyed, presumably before society realized that the rulers should be scientists). With the help of nanotechnology, they have

basically unlimited power. Unfortunately for the reader, they seem to use a lot of this power to throw fancy parties. It's sort of like "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous," but with nanotechnology.

This is not to say there aren't some good ideas in A\_r\_i\_s\_t\_o\_i. The problem is that there is too much stuff around them. It took almost half of the book to get to some of the ideas I found most interesting: that of the responsibility of a creator to the created, that of free will, the drawbacks of freedom over slavery, and so on. And getting to that point was not easy. For some books you need a dictionary by your side; for this you need a G\_r\_e\_e\_k dictionary.

Towards the middle of the book we leave the neo-Greek society that Williams has drawn (one friend thought it seemed more Oriental, but I kept feeling as if I had fallen into a Hellenic SCA creation) and enter a sort of Euro-feudal society. It is here, in this microcosm, that the conflict begun on the macrocosm is engaged. Layers within layers, here as in so many other areas of the novel: multiple levels of personality, multiple levels of reality, multiple levels of Life. (I was reminded of this watching a recent S\_t\_a\_r T\_r\_e\_k: T\_h\_e N\_e\_x\_t G\_e\_n\_e\_r\_a\_t\_i\_o\_n episode!)

A\_r\_i\_s\_t\_o\_i is certainly a thought-provoking novel, but a bit tough-going in parts. Williams uses some stylistic techniques which, while serving a useful purpose, are often more distraction than guide. I personally would have preferred a different focus, but I can't say this is a bad novel or not worth reading. But you should know what you're getting into.

AMMONITE by Nicola Griffith  
Del Rey Discovery, ISBN 0-345-37891-1, 1993, \$3.99.  
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper  
Copyright 1993 Evelyn C. Leeper

This is the first of the "Del Rey Discovery" series that I have read, though there have been six previously published. Most of them seem to be of the space adventure mold, but with some New Age philosophy, shamanism, and ecology added on.

A\_m\_m\_o\_n\_i\_t\_e, to take this specific book, starts with the idea that the colonists on the planet GP ("Jeep") were struck by a virus that killed most of the colonists--including all of the men--and left them isolated. Now, hundreds of years later, the Company is trying to regain a foothold on jeep. They have a vaccine against the virus, which m\_a\_y work, and they have an all-female team to try to make contact with the inhabitants. The team soon becomes just one person trying to make contact with the various tribes and draw them together, while at the same time trying to discover the secret of their survival.

It sounded vaguely reminiscent of T\_h\_e\_L\_e\_f\_t\_H\_a\_n\_d\_o\_f\_D\_a\_r\_k\_n\_e\_s\_s, but much of the anthropological story and even the biological riddle ends up wrapped in New Age channeling and the lifestyles of various indigenous peoples. While some might find this to their liking, I am not one of them. Books that see the solution to problems as "becoming one with the world" tend to strike me more as political tracts than as stories (so for that matter do the technophilic stories that one finds in A\_n\_a\_l\_o\_g these days), and I prefer my messages a bit subtler and a bit less pat.

This could have been a very good novel, and in spite of its flaws is still worth reading, but if the trend that the "Discovery" series seems to be taking continues, I suspect it will end up focused on a fairly small market.

(Some reviewers have said that this is the first "lesbian science fiction novel" marketed by a major publisher. Assuming by this they mean a novel in which the main character or characters are lesbian, I suppose it's about time, but calling it a "lesbian novel" is like calling S\_t\_a\_r\_s\_h\_i\_p\_T\_r\_o\_o\_p\_e\_r\_s a Filipino novel. While A\_m\_m\_o\_n\_i\_t\_e's theme won't appeal to everyone, it certainly should work across gender and sexual orientation lines.)

## SOMMERSBY

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: This is a surprisingly satisfying remake and enhancement of T\_h\_e\_R\_e\_t\_u\_r\_n\_o\_f\_M\_a\_r\_t\_i\_n\_G\_u\_e\_r\_r\_e. It may offer as much to people who have seen the original as to those who have not.  
Rating: +2 (-4 to +4).

The day I am writing this review Siskel and Ebert had an episode in which they reviewed five films of which four-- S\_o\_m\_m\_e\_r\_s\_b\_y, T\_h\_e\_V\_a\_n\_i\_s\_h\_i\_n\_g, H\_o\_m\_e\_w\_a\_r\_d\_B\_o\_u\_n\_d, and G\_u\_n\_C\_r\_a\_z\_y--are remakes. There are hard choices to make when you remake somebody else's film. Do you just reproduce the original or do you vary things? When you vary the telling, can you really improve on the original? Does your film have something to offer people who have seen the original? S\_o\_m\_m\_e\_r\_s\_b\_y is a rather remarkable remake of the 1982 film T\_h\_e\_R\_e\_t\_u\_r\_n\_o\_f\_M\_a\_r\_t\_i\_n\_G\_u\_e\_r\_r\_e. S\_o\_m\_m\_e\_r\_s\_b\_y is Nicholas Meyer and Anthony Shaffer's retelling of the M\_a\_r\_t\_i\_n\_G\_u\_e\_r\_r\_e story with some very ironic complexities added. And there is enough complexity in this film that, in fact, it may be a better film the first time through if you have some idea what twists are coming. Meyer and Shaffer have balanced their story so it is equally rewarding if you have or have not seen the original.

The Civil War has been over for two years in Vine Hill, Tennessee, and Laurel Sommersby (played by Jodie Foster) is about ready to declare herself a widow and remarry. If the truth be known, Jack Sommersby was always better at being a "good old boy" than he was at being a husband. But then Jack (played by Richard Gere) returns from a Union prison camp determined to improve Vine Hill in general and his marriage in specific. His six-year absence has made a new man of Jack, so much so that people start to question if perhaps this new man might really not be Jack. Jack sets about trying to fix up the war-ravaged valley and to give a boost to the economy. Or is he just trying a confidence scheme? What Jack is doing and why he is doing it make this a very different film from

the original. One negative touch is that the film's attitudes towards race relations seem a bit anachronistic, but they are not quite as pat as they first seem.

Kudos goes to Meyer and Shaffer's story which was adapted by Meyer and Sarah Kernochen into a screenplay. Director John Amiel, who also directed television's "Singing Detective," gives us a complex story beautifully photographed to give a strong post-Civil War feel. While the score has a much more traditional tone than most of Danny Elfman's scores, it is a very likable, melodic score.

\_ S \_ o \_ m \_ m \_ e \_ r \_ s \_ b \_ y is at least satisfying and often is poignant. I give it a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.