

will tell you that with two Masters degrees, I thought I had a good education. But somehow everybody else seems to understand how to get packages open, and I have to admit that when it comes to opening a box of cereal or a packet of raisins, I am a complete idiot. I mean, I read the instructions on the package. Honestly I

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do. But nothing ever opens right for me. Say I want to open a box of Grape-nuts--why do they call them that? Have you ever looked at the ingredients? Grape-nuts are made with all kinds of things but they have no nuts and no grapes among the ingredients. Okay, so here I am opening this box of grapeless, nutless Grape-nuts and the side of the box has that red area that says "push in here and pull up." Now when I was out Strep Throat, that was when the rest of you found out how to open these things up, right? I mean I can push there until my thumb goes "pop" or until I have accordioned in the side of the box, but I won't make any progress whatsoever getting the Grape-nuts out of the box. The rest of you know how to do that, don't you?

Then there are those cellophane packs of raisins. You know how to open them and are just not telling me, right? I mean, I can make it my evening's entertainment just trying to rip the corner off one of those things so I can get something out. I'll tug. I'll pull. I'll even see the cellophane stretch, just to tantalize me. I'll give up and get a bag of potato chips instead. Oh, potato chips. Same sort of problem, only different. Chips come in those foil bags that have air inside them. So what do I do? I grab the edge and try to tear. Just like the raisins, nothing will give. I grab the edge and pull with all my might, my palms brace against the cushioning of the air pocket in the bag. I don't know, maybe I am hoping that the air inside will force its way into the seal. All of a sudden the air is pierced by a loud "BANG!" Evelyn comes running to find me standing there, potato chips raining on my shoes and the bottom of the bag is in strips as if a cherry bomb went off inside. The top of the bag is stretched but untornd.

It was sixth grade, right? Look, it wasn't my fault I got a sore throat. Lots of kids get Strep Throat. Won't anybody tell me what I missed? [-mrl]

2. I probably should have mentioned this one when I was publishing World-Wide-Web URL sites a couple of months ago, but BABYLON 5 maintains a very nice set of pages starting at

<http://www.hyperion.com/lurk/lurker.html>

Particularly useful is the episode list and its links to discussion about each episode and comments by the show's creator. [-mrl]

3. WNYC radio in New York will be running the radio adaptation of Isaac Asimov's "Foundation" trilogy on Saturdays at 10:30 PM on AM 820. (Actually, it's not entirely clear if it starts at 10:30 PM or 10 PM; it is listed one way in the highlights section and another in the schedule.) [-ecl]

4. ANTI-ICE by Stephen Baxter (Harper Prism, ISBN 0-06-105421-6, 1994 (1993c), 289pp, US\$5.50) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Three-quarters mechanical whiz-bang science fiction, one quarter political philosophy, this book is extremely reminiscent of the science fiction writings of Jules Verne (particularly 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA) and H. G. Wells (particularly FIRST MeN IN THE MOON). And I suppose it is fitting that it pays homage to both an Englishman and a Frenchman, because the political part is about the conflicts between the English and the French, or rather among the English, the French, and the Germans. Of course, although in the novel it is British foreign policy toward Europe in general vis-a-vis Britain's semi-permanent conflict with Prussia that comes

under criticism, this is really an extremely thinly veiled description of American foreign policy towards Europe and our semi-permanent conflict with the Soviet Union. The descriptions of the use of, and attitudes toward, the super-weapons used in the book are clear references to our use of the atomic bomb in Japan, particularly the characters' discussion of whether the weapons were necessary or whether the enemy was about to surrender anyway.

I have to say that all this, along with the discussion of anarchists such as Proudhon, was far more interesting to me (if a bit heavy-handed) than the loving detail in which the mechanics of the various mechanical and transportation devices were described. I suppose somewhere in here I should mention the basic premise: in 1720 a comet crashed into Antarctica. This comet was made of "anti-ice," which is stable when at the cold temperatures of that region, but releases terrific energy in a matter/anti-matter reaction when heated about freezing. So this is also an alternate history novel a la steampunk, with a bit of Treknobabble thrown in. There's something for everyone here. Anyway, the British figure out how to harness the energy in anti-ice and use it to produce amazing technical marvels (monorails over the Channel, rocketships, and so on). But it also has potential as a weapon and that is much of the underlying motivation of the story.

As I said, to me the political ramifications and the alternate history aspect were more interesting than the technical details, but this novel works well on many levels and would certainly appeal to fans of "nuts-and-bolts" science fiction as well. [-ecl]

5. Hugo Factoid of the Week: The best batting average with at least two nominations is a tie between Walter Miller, Jr. (A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ and "The Darfstellar") and Octavia Butler ("Speech Sounds" and "Bloodchild"), each with two wins out of two nominations. Next week: who has the most Hugo wins in the fiction categories? [-ecl]

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The most costly of all follies is to believe
passionately in the palpably not true. It is the
chief occupation of mankind.

-- H. L. Mencken