

think there is something of the exhibitionist in anyone who strips down to what is basically underwear and then goes into physical public displays in that condition. Now don't get me wrong. I am not a prude. I have no strong objection to public displays of sex, but public displays of exercise have very little entertainment

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value.

On top of that, my exercise program is not going exactly as I had planned. I have the sort of build that a human is supposed to have. When humans evolved there was survival value in carrying around your energy with you in case food reserves dried up. Most of the younger and more immature of the species have not yet developed this capacity so carry very little with them in the way of energy reserves. These days society places a premium on being immature--take a look at the movie that are being made--and otherwise intelligent adults (even me) strive to look immature. People want to look like their bodies have not yet properly developed energy reserves. They wish to look--in a word--thin.

So, not being an exhibitionist, I got myself an exercycle. Now I know me. I get bored easily. I guess that is the main reason I don't run. It's boring. (Yes, it would also lower property values, but what have my neighbors ever done for me? When I go to neighborhood events, I still get asked, "Are you new to the neighborhood?" In geological terms I guess I am. I have lived in my house for only about a decade.) I figure that while on an exercycle I can watch a movie on the VCR. It is a little hard to hear over the machinery. so I just turn up the amplifier a bit. So I am on this program of going 80 miles a week on this neo-Medieval torture device. After 10,000 miles of this lunatic self-improvement program, I do see changes. I am still paunchy but I am going hard of hearing. What's more, I think I have been cheated somewhere along the line. I have read how people became addicted to exercise. Their brain creates a drug, endorphins or something, and they get high when the exercise, but they find the exercise addictive. (Uh, keep that under your hat, huh? It think if it were generally known that these greaseballs running through my neighborhood were endorphin junkies in the act of shooting up, my property values would plummet.) Well, I hate to tell you this, but

I am not in the least addicted to my exercycle. In fact, to be honest, I feel much better when I don't exercise. I hate that darn exercycle e_v_e_r_y time I get on it. Surely after 10,000 miles I should be getting my endorphins. No way. I don't know where they are going, but wherever it is there should be enough now for a really good weekend or two.

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It's amazing how long this country's been going to hell without actually getting there.

--Andy Rooney

THE CRYSTAL EMPIRE by L. Neil Smith
Tor, 1989 (1986c), 0-812-55425-6, \$4.50.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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This alternate history novel slipped by me when it first came out. Based on the premise that the Black Plague (actually a variation of it) killed off, not 33%, but 95% of Europe. The result is a world in which there are three large empires: a "Saracen-Jewish" one, a "Mughal-Arab" one, and a "Sino-Aztec" one. Europe is ruled by the Saracen empire, which is currently fighting a war against the Mughal empire on "the island continent." (I never could quite figure out where this was--at times it seemed to be Japan, but that seems an unlikely place for those two empires to interface.) The story takes place at the present time (well, about the year 2000 C.E., though dates are given in the Islamic calendar).

The main character, Sedrich Oswaldsohn, lives in a Europe ruled by superstition. Technological advances are, for the most part, prohibited and religious groups are in authority locally. The two main groups are

the Brotherhood of the Cult of Jesus in Hell (a Christian group run by men) and the Mistresses of the Sisterhood (a Wiccan group run by women). Sedrich develops a new invention and is persecuted by the head of the Brotherhood, who eventually drives Sedrich out. Sedrich then travels to America, where he changes his name to Fireclaw and lives as an Amerind (or whatever the term would be in this universe) on the outskirts of the Aztec empire and gets involved in a mission to deliver a Saracen princess to the Aztec prince.

The alternate world is of some interest, though I suspect that had the Spaniards not conquered the Incas, the Incas would have eventually spread northward and overcame the Aztecs. But more importantly, I find it hard to believe the level of technology achieved by the Aztecs while at the same time they retained massive human sacrifice and other cultural attitudes that would seem to result in a stagnant rather than an advancing culture. In part this can be explained by the "Dreamers," six million people who dream of alternate worlds (including ours) and whose dreams are written down as directions for producing new technology. (There was an interesting counterpoint in the opening scene of a medieval pogrom against the Jews of the village with the scenes towards the end of the six million dreamers.) However, I still find the results unconvincing.

Some may say my final complaint has to do with "political correctness." Smith has written a very brutal (though not explicit) rape scene for no reason that I can discern (the rape scene may be necessary to the plot, but not the manner of it). What particularly struck me about it was its similarity to rape scenes in J. Neil Schulman's R_a_i_n_b_o_w_C_a_d_e_n_z_a. Now normally I wouldn't make anything of

this, but there are two points worth noting. First, both Schulman and Smith have won the Libertarian Party's Prometheus Award, which would indicate a certain similarity in their philosophies (at least to the people who give the award). Second, Smith acknowledges a phrase of Schulman's at the beginning of T_h_e_C_r_y_s_t_a_l_E_m_p_i_r_e and refers to Schulman as an "so-far-unindicted co-conspirator", and thus I think it more than just coincidence that they have written similar scenes. And as in T_h_e_R_a_i_n_b_o_w_C_a_d_e_n_z_a there is a scene in which the characters discuss this rape and how it's just a manifestation of male violence, the same as warfare and fighting.

Now this is not the main part of the book, and perhaps I am over-reacting to it, but I found this offensive, unconvincing, and trivializing. This may have colored how I felt about the book as a whole (though I wasn't greatly enamored of it even before then), but the bottom line is that I cannot recommend this book.

PARENTHOOD

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: Several stories about styles of parenting are a single story. Because each story is on different approaches to raising children, the whole is better than the sum of its parts. Diane Wiest gives a stand-out performance. Rating: +3.

If one had to compare P_a_r_e_n_t_h_o_o_d to another film, one would have to say that at least in structure it resembles H_a_n_n_a_h_a_n_d_H_e_r_S_i_s_t_e_r_s. Like that film, it is really many stories about one extended family. As such it can tell several parallel stories at the same time. Where it differs is that each of the stories examines different aspects of one phenomenon, parenthood. Also the individual characters here are a little more sympathetic and better characters from the point of view of storytelling. One cares more what happens to these people. Each of the individual stories is decent but the whole is considerably more than the sum of its parts and each story has bearing on the others. In one plotline a parent seems not to use enough discipline, while another warns against the discipline approach. The result is a mosaic that views parenthood from many different angles and approaches and at times even comes near to restoring something that has been missing from film: some powerful drama.

The patriarch of the family is Frank, played by Jason Robards, who is justifiably plagued by guilt over the lack of attention he gave his children and is working it out by spoiling his wild son Larry (played by Tom Hulce). Frank's oldest son is Gil (played by top-billed Steve Martin). Gil appears to be the most stable and successful of Frank's children but his career is souring and his eight-year-old seems to have emotional problems. Frank's son-in-law Nathan (played by Rick Moranis) has an intensive program to turn his three-year-old into an adult genius by the time she is four. But the most compelling story is of Frank's daughter Helen (played by Diane Wiest) whose life is a shambles and a desperate struggle to raise her two wild children.

While at times the writing is excellent, director Ron Howard seems to feel the presence of Steve Martin requires an occasional timeout for Martin's brand of physical comedy. He also throws in some happier moments that verge on being saccharine. Their effect is to betray some of the more serious drama.

Perhaps P_a_r_e_n_t_h_o_o_d comes up short when compared to an O_r_d_i_n_a_r_y_P_e_o_p_l_e, but with most Hollywood output geared to a teenage market, we have to be grateful for the films that are engaging on an adult level. I rate it a +3 on the -4 to +4 scale.

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Flying
Comments by Mark R. Leeper
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Some malicious deity put in a kink in human psychology some place. Deep down among all the instinct to survive there is a completely ridiculous and useless urge to fly in spite of the fact that the human anatomy is horribly unsuited to fulfilling this urge. Our muscle-to-mass ratio is much too small to power such flight. Only over the past decade or so has human-powered flight become at all possible and then only for the most athletic.

Yet flying is in so many human dreams there must be some explanation. There is a theory that what sets humans apart from the other primates is that for a piece of our evolution humans were aquatic apes. There is not a lot of evidence for the theory except that it would help to explain a lot. Among other things, the instinct to fly may really be a vestige of an instinct to float. But in any case, this instinct seems to manifest itself in a lot of unusual ways. Besides the people who engage in real flight, pilots and such, you have people who build and fly model airplanes, kids who are fascinated by helium balloons, people who throw paper airplanes, ... the list goes on and on. You don't hear about a lot of people who go on their weekends to look at crustaceans but there are a lot of bird watchers around. Also there are butterfly collectors and kite flyers. I subscribed for a year to

A_v_i_a_t_i_o_n_W_e_e_k_a_n_d_S_p_a_c_e_T_e_c_h_n_o_l_o_g_y to follow what was going on and to

see the pictures of the planes.

But I guess I have my greatest interest in early planes. Sure, I like going up in a 747--I like going up in an elevator too--but the earlier planes that give you more of the feel of the air currents are more fun. Perhaps the most enjoyable airplane experience that I remember is flying in a Russian Ilyushin prop plane from Beijing to Xian by the light of a full moon. But that is another story.

Anyway, I had some interest when I heard there was an aerodrome in Rhinebeck, New York, that flies bi-planes. So I made the three-hour-drive. The aerodrome was built in the late 1940s on some farmland in the Hyde Park area. It just started as one man's hobby restoring planes. As he found other enthusiasts and lots of on-lookers he decided to make a living from his hobby and regular shows began. Today the deal is \$3 to see the planes and \$4 more to see the air show (barnstorming on Saturday, World War I flying on Sunday)) and \$20 for a 15-minute ride (more like a 12-minute ride, really) in a New Standard D-25 barnstorming bi-plane.

The environs in the \$3 admission include a museum with three small hangars and maybe about twenty classic planes in various states of repair. Down the hill on the flight line of the airfield are about

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fifteen more planes and a few classic cars, apparently just being displayed by their owners by invitation since the announcer on the loudspeaker had to keep telling owners to move them or they would be in the way of the planes.

So we went to arrange for the bi-plane flight. Evelyn was unsure she wanted to go. "C'mon," I wheedled, "when will you get another chance to ride in a bi-plane?" Evelyn occasionally needs a little wheedling.

"How bumpy is the ride?" Evelyn asked the woman selling tickets. "Not very," she was assured. "Okay, I'll go."

"Great," I said. "Let me know how it is." (I like to keep Evelyn a little off-balance.)

"We can tell the pilot to be gentle," we were assured. "No!" I yelled. "Don't you dare!" I should say my attitude toward flying, or going on roller coasters, or eating hot food is pretty much the same. I get a great deal of pleasure out of making myself say, "My God! What have I done to myself? How could I have been so stupid?" Then, when it is over I look around and say, "Hey! That was great! How did you like it?" This is my particular form of machismo, conveniently forgetting or concealing moments of panic. Riding around in a motorized box-kite seems like a likely source of concealable panic.

Well, as I walked around I got a feel for the aerodrome. The people who ran the thing were supposed to be giving it a 1918 feel, not entirely consistently I felt. The food sold at the snack bar was not too authentic and the prices certainly were not, but the bleachers were. They were basically just loose rails placed on stacks of cinder blocks at each end. The rails had a sort of splintery, unfinished authenticity. The souvenir stand which featured a \$42 videotape of the proceedings was less than authentic, but I am willing to take their word that the restrooms were authentically of a 1918 style. As was the music, though the PA system it was being played on had a less than authentic feel.

Well, the time finally came for our flight in a bi-plane. The plane takes up four plus a pilot. I was expecting to sit next to Evelyn, but apparently the pilot had other ideas. He wanted the heavier people to sit in front, nearer the engine, and made the common mistake of thinking that I am heavy. I am not, of course, but I always find myself surrounded by people much denser than I am, so I give the impression of being, of being, ... well, pleasantly filled out. I did not, however, want to argue with someone in whose hands I would be putting my life so I wedged myself next to the fatter of two men who would also be passengers on the same flight. Now this guy was a porker. For me sitting next to him on the narrow seat, the seat belt was merely a formality.

Flying a bi-plane you run into another one of those weird psychological quirks. From the ground it looks really nifty to be flying a bi-plane. What seems so much niftier than flying a 747? The ground looks a lot the same no matter which you are flying in. A bi-

plane flies a little lower. It vibrates a little more and is a little more windy. But when you are sitting in that little seat, you don't see it is a bi-plane. You don't see very much of the plane at all. You see some struts, if you look down you see the ground, and you feel a little more wind. It is only with great effort that you can even turn your head and look back. You look at the ground and it looks like it looks through the window of a jumbo jet. I mean, it's great to know you are in a bi-plane, but I expected more of the bi-plane experience. Next time I insist on driving. If they don't let me drive perhaps I will settle for firing a few rounds from a Lewis gun. (I wonder where I can get one?) For much of the flight the big thrill was looking in the rear-view mirror mounted on the strut next to me. At least in the mirror I could see the fuselage and tail. Well, what can I say? For \$20 you ride in a bi-plane. You really want "the bi-plane experience"? You have to learn to fly. About eight minutes into the flight (i.e., toward the end), the pilot put the plane into a climb, then a dive. He rolled the ground up on one side, then the other. Not bad, I guess.

Well, when the flight was over I found myself a rail to sit on and started writing about flying. Evelyn went off to be part of the 1918 fashion show. They had her wear this ugly green dress of the period. Green isn't her color. Green is a frog's color. Evelyn's color is beige, mostly, with a few places being notable exceptions.

By the time Evelyn got back it was pretty nearly time for the air show. The announcer started out by explaining that many of the people were covering more than one job because some of the planes and fliers were off in Oshkosh(!) for a national air show. I would like to believe the air show that followed was greatly affected by the short-handedness. It is clear that something funny was happening. There were an awful lot of fluffs.

No what they had were a bunch of bi-planes, some armored cars, some tanks, an old fire engine---that sort of thing. They had to tie these together into some sort of story about World War I. If you take two five-year-olds and put them in a sandbox with toy planes, toy armored cars, toy tanks, etc., you will discover that they will invent a little story to enact as an excuse to play with the toys. It won't be logical or in any way believable by adult standards. It will be a pretty stupid story, but it will keep the five-year-olds entertained. Well, that was the story they enacted with full-sized equipment. It was a bad imitation of a bad melodrama and today it was particularly performed. It was supposed to take place on the French-German frontier during World War I. It's full of characters like the handsome RAF ace, Percy Pureheart, Mademoiselle Fifi, and the villainous Black Baron, complete with eyebrow-pencilled moustache lathering himself after Trudy Truelove.

The ace flies genuine World War I planes, like the 1931 Great Lakes Trainer (okay, so Oshkosh took its toll on the credibility). The Black Baron kept doing things like dropping bombs on the field that either failed to go off or exploded in a cloud of smoke six feet or so from where the "bomb" could still be seen lying on the ground.

Now I cannot complain that the action was t o t a l l y unconvincing. A number of people in the audience had brought dogs. A large black dog near me really was getting into the story. Every time a bomb was dropped, he would bark excitedly. As the bi-planes flew by he would stare intently at them. I am not sure he understood everything going on down on the field, but then I didn't either. There seemed to be strange people wandering across the field at odd moments. I guess some were setting up scenes while others were playing in them. I think they do that in Japanese Noh plays too, but at least there the setup people wear black so you know to ignore them. In one scene a tank was supposed to roll out from behind a fence that hid it, except the wind blew the fence down, spoiling the surprise. So somebody had to walk across the field and put the fence back up.

At some point the Black Baron kidnaps Trudy Truelove, ties her to the wing of his bi-plane (off-stage, of course), and then flies over the field with her looking suspiciously like a dummy hanging off the wing. Eventually she falls right into a fortuitous haystack. Well, actually, the dummy missed the haystack by about eight feet and bounced spastically for twelve. She was all right, we were told. Actually, Trudy seemed to be really resilient. Even when she was being kidnapped by the Black Baron she could be easily seen to be laughing instead of distressed.

And so the afternoon went. The story--if such it was--progressed slowly. At one point three bi-planes that were part of a scene just flew off over the trees and took about five minutes to return while the announcer frantically ad-libbed. I suggested to Evelyn that they might have had an emergency call to the Empire State Building. The show went for about ninety minutes with about forty minutes of story including stunt flying when the crazy Farmer Gigliotti accidentally solos the first time he has flown in a plane, this time in an authentic World War I Piper Cub.

Ah, show business!

