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THE MT VOID

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1. The next book discussion in Lincroft will be about Dan Simmons's T\_h\_e\_F\_a\_l\_l\_o\_f\_H\_y\_p\_e\_r\_i\_o\_n. Rather than reblurb it, I will include later in this MT VOID the comments I made about both H\_y\_p\_e\_r\_i\_o\_n and T\_h\_e\_F\_a\_l\_l\_o\_f\_H\_y\_p\_e\_r\_i\_o\_n last year.

2. Picture the hero of a fast-paced film thriller. Yeah, I'm picturing him too. Ain't he somptin'? Look at those bulging muscles. Listen to him talk. Wow! I didn't think he even knew three-syllable words and he used one right there. Gee. At least I think it was a three-syllable word. Who can tell with that accent of his? And gosh, what's he doing? That's three-inch reinforced steel plate and he's kicking through it like it's cardboard. Holy Cow! Look at him. One man with the brute force of a bull and the cunning intellect of an ox. Boy, it sure is fun to watch him smash the bad guys, isn't it? That is real script-writing.

Unfortunately, the films we are going to show at the next Leeperhouse fest (on Thursday, September 19, at 7 PM) are from the time before the really good thriller-heroes. These are thrillers about people who get bewildered and have to think rather than kick their way out of a tough spot. Sorry. No, I'm not.

Pre-Schwarzenegger Thrillers

THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE (1962), dir. by John Frankenheimer

MARATHON MAN (1976), dir. by John Schlesinger

THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE is a great film with an interesting past. United Artists decided not to make the film because the company chief, Arthur Krim, thought the story was anti-American. Then President Kennedy, at the urging of Frank Sinatra, called Krim and expressed his admiration for the novel. The final film is said to have been one of Kennedy's favorite films. The film was later pulled from circulation, reportedly because of the Kennedy assassination. Whether what we see in the film was really possible

or not has been hotly debated. For years the word was that the concept was pure fantasy. A year or so ago a non-fiction book called T\_h\_e\_S\_e\_a\_r\_c\_h\_f\_o\_r\_t\_h\_e\_M\_a\_n\_c\_h\_u\_r\_i\_a\_n\_C\_a\_n\_d\_i\_d\_a\_t\_e claimed that the film is not only plausible, it is conservative. Laurence Harvey, Angela Lansbury, Frank Sinatra, and Janet Leigh star in one of the great American film thrillers.

THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE is a hard act to follow, but MARATHON MAN with Dustin Hoffman, Laurence Olivier, and Roy Scheider really is another edge-of-the-seat sort of film. You spend the first twenty minutes wondering what these story lines could possibly have to do with each other. Once you find out, you're hooked. People who saw this film years ago still cringe a little when they hear the question, "Is it safe?"

Two comments: These films together total over four hours, so we will be starting promptly at 7 PM, and having only a short break.

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And the second film may, as they say, "be too intense for some viewers" (at least in part). Actually, the first film may be too intense for some viewers. If you draw a line in the sand in front of a chicken, it will hypnotize her, so even a line drawn in the sand is too intense for some viewers. Intensity is in the mind of the beholder.

3. There is something funny about the system for choosing Supreme Court Justices. You are choosing a candidate to be one of the absolute authorities on what the U. S. Constitution says. S/he supposedly understands the Constitution and its intent more than we mortals. Then for him to get in a lot of folks have to be sure that he interprets things the same way they do. It's like telling an doctor, "Okay, you can cure my headaches. But first you have to agree what is causing them is a sinus problem."

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Every new truth which has ever been propounded has, for a time caused mischief; it has produced discomfort, and often unhappiness; sometimes disturbing social and religious arrangements.... And if the truth is very great as well as very new, the harm is serious. Men are made uneasy; they flinch; they cannot bear the sudden light; a general restlessness supervenes; the face of society is disturbed, or perhaps convulsed; old interests and old beliefs have been destroyed before new ones have been created. These symptoms are the precursors of revolution; they have preceded all the great changes through which the world has passed.

-- Henry Thomas Buckle

HYPERION by Dan Simmons

Bantam Spectra, 1990 (1989c), ISBN 0-553-28368-5, \$4.95.

THE FALL OF HYPERION by Dan Simmons

Doubleday Foundation, 1990, ISBN 0-385-24950-0, \$19.95.

A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

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What we have here is a glorious failure.

You may notice that I have labeled this "a book review," not "two book reviews" as you might have expected. That is because, physical reality notwithstanding, this is a single book. I cannot imagine any reason, other than greed, for not publishing it as a single volume. Yes, I know publishers claim that they can't publish a book of a thousand pages because 1) no one will buy it, and 2) it is physically difficult to produce. Yet New American Library has published the 1000-page D\_o\_n\_Q\_u\_i\_x\_o\_t\_e and the 1400-page L\_e\_s\_M\_i\_s\_e\_r\_a\_b\_l\_e\_s, people do purchase them, and they haven't fallen apart, even after repeated readings. The final death blow to this argument, of course, is that Doubleday is producing a book club edition with both "novels" in a single volume! Rumor has it that book stores don't like thick books because they can't display as many in the same volume. Life's tough.

Issuing this novel as two volumes is doubly annoying because the second half is so long and drawn-out that I found myself saying, "Why didn't Simmons just add another hundred or so pages onto the first half and wrap the story up there?" (I am not the only person to make this observation.) Because it came out as a separate volume it had to be about the same length as the first half and this means padding, padding, and more padding.

The first half (to begin at the beginning, as they say) has been compared to Chaucer's C\_a\_n\_t\_e\_r\_b\_u\_r\_y\_T\_a\_l\_e\_s in that it is a group of pilgrims telling stories. But there is a basic difference. In T\_h\_e\_C\_a\_n\_t\_e\_r\_b\_u\_r\_y\_T\_a\_l\_e\_s, the stories are about other people; in H\_y\_p\_e\_r\_i\_o\_n they are about the story-tellers themselves. And in this area, Simmons does very well, managing to have each story s\_o\_u\_n\_d as if the teller were telling it: the story told by the priest sounds the way a priest would talk, the story told by the soldier sounds the way a soldier would talk, etc. In addition, each story is interesting in itself. Each story is also almost novel-length in itself; any one of them, with an ending added on, could have been published as a stand-alone novel. (Why do I even suggest this?! Next we'll have H\_y\_p\_e\_r\_i\_o\_n:T\_h\_e\_S\_p\_e\_c\_i\_a\_l\_E\_d\_i\_t\_i\_o\_n, redivided and sold as six novels!)

The basic story begins with seven pilgrims traveling to the "Time Tombs," odd structures on the planet Hyperion which are traveling backwards in time and somehow connected with the Shrike. The Shrike is a monster that appears to be a humanoid made up of a large collection of

knives and razor blades, leading a friend of mine to describe H\_y\_p\_e\_r\_i\_o\_n (the first half) as "Freddy Krueger on Mars." It turns out (in the second half) that there is a very good reason for the Shrike and its presence, and that this is more than just a desire to put in a slasher monster, but many people may be so turned off by the concept in the first half that they will not buy the second half and find out (never mind reading a thousand pages).

In order to figure out what the Shrike is and the secret of the Time Tombs, the pilgrims tell their stories of how they are connected with Hyperion. Of these stories, I found the most interesting to be Sol Weintraub's (the philosopher's) story, full of questions about God and the nature of sacrifice. Sol's daughter Rachel has been caught in a "backwash" at the Time Tombs and is now living backwards. This is difficult to make consistent (Philip Dick didn't quite succeed in C\_o\_u\_n\_t\_e\_r-c\_l\_o\_c\_k\_W\_o\_r\_l\_d either), and Simmons makes a few slips. To solve the problems of day-to-day living, Rachel's memory regresses only during sleep, so at least conversations can flow forward. But when towards the end Sol notices that Rachel's hair is getting shorter and thinning out, I found myself wondering, "But what about all those other years she was regressing? Wasn't her hair (and for that matter, her fingernails) getting shorter then?" And somehow the whole rationale Simmons had built up seemed to collapse.

While the first half is the pilgrims' stories, the second half is a single story (though told from many points of view), full of space battles, politics, philosophy, poetry, and anything else Simmons had handy--as I said, it's heavily padded. Without giving too much away, I have to say that the religion expounded in the second half seems too trinitarian to me, given its origins. (You'll probably have to read the book to understand what I mean.) The padding becomes particularly evident in Sol and Rachel's story. Sol is convinced that the Time Tombs hold the answer to Rachel's problem, and therefore they must reach them before Rachel regresses to her "birth." So we hear him think, "Now Rachel is one day old." A few chapters later, he thinks, "Now Rachel is eight hours old." Then a few chapters more, "Now Rachel is two hours old." Then, "Now Rachel is one hour old." Then, "Now Rachel is thirty minutes old." And so on and so on. Like Zeno's arrow, we seem to be forever approaching the moment of Rachel's birth without actually having any chance of getting there.

Simmons does have the ability to write in many different styles. (His P\_h\_a\_s\_e\_s\_o\_f\_G\_r\_a\_v\_i\_t\_y, a much better work in my opinion than this, is written very differently than any of the pilgrims' stories here.) And he has a sly sense of humor. The interstellar society that exists in H\_y\_p\_e\_r\_i\_o\_n is the result of the Hegira--humanity's outpouring from Earth when it was destroyed. Throughout the novel, Simmons speaks of "pre-Hegira" and "post-Hegira" events, and so it is only a few lines later that you realize his reference to "pre-Hegira Muslims" on page 199 is a sort of historical pun.

Simmons also seems to have a real understanding of how electronic bulletin boards work in his description of the All Thing, a communications network joining all of the Hegemony (also page 199 of H\_y\_p\_e\_r\_i\_o\_n):

Days and nights would pass with me monitoring the Senate on farcaster cable or tapped into the All Thing. Someone once estimated that the All Thing deals with about a hundred active pieces of Hegemony legislation per day, and during my months spent screwed into the sensorium I missed none of them. My voice and name became well known on the debate channels. No bill was too small, no issue too simple or too complex for my input. The simple act of voting every few minutes gave me a false sense of having a\_c\_c\_o\_m\_p\_l\_i\_s\_h\_ed something. I finally gave up the political obsession only after I realized that accessing the All Thing regularly meant either staying home or turning into a walking zombie. A person constantly busy accessing on his implants makes a pitiful sight in public and it didn't take Helenda's decision to make me realize that if I stayed home I would turn into an All Thing sponge like so many millions of other slugs around the Web.

If Simmons himself has made an awkward structure for his novel, the publisher has gilded the lily by managing to leave page 305 out entirely from both the hardcover and trade paperback editions of T\_h\_e\_F\_a\_l\_l\_o\_f\_H\_y\_p\_e\_r\_i\_o\_n, and instead to provide t\_w\_o copies of page 306! Naturally, a major plot element is revealed on the missing page (or would be revealed, were it there), so after reading eight hundred pages over a period of a year, the reader is s\_t\_i\_l\_l left in the dark. And don't try blaming this on computers: back when a publisher set a book for publishing in the traditional way, s/he double-checked the films before sending them to the printer. S/he should still do this, computers notwithstanding. I think it's evident that this was not done in this case.

This book is an example of a work in which the whole is less than the sum of the parts. This leads to an odd paradox: the first half has been nominated for a Hugo and may well win, though had the whole book

been nominated, it might not have. It is only in the second half that the story becomes tedious. As far as its competition, one of the other nominees is volume three of a six (or seven) volume series of which the first two were both nominated for Hugos but didn't win, and another is volume two of a three-volume (at least) series of which the first one was nominated for a Hugo but didn't win. (Do you detect a pattern here? Norman Spinrad, in his column in the June 1990 I s a a c A s i m o v' s, has a lot to say about "seriesism," and much of it applies here.) In this sort of field, it wouldn't surprise me at all to see the first half of a book win a Hugo.

### THE COMMITMENTS

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: The setting upstages the plot in this story of a group of working-class (or dole-class) Dubliners who form a rock band. Seeing all those Irish singing and immersing themselves in American popular music has a sort of whimsical irony akin to that of T h e S i n g i n g N u n. But somehow a film set in this interesting city could focus on something more meaningful than its music. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4).

Alan Parker has been a new filmmaker for eighteen years now through at least ten major films. The way he remains a new filmmaker is by making a clean break with the past and jumping off in a new direction every film he makes. The man made B u g s y M a l o n e, M i d n i g h t E x p r e s s, F a m e, S h o o t t h e M o o n, P i n k F l o y d: T h e W a l l, B i r d y, A n g e l H e a r t, M i s s i s s i p p i B u r n i n g, C o m e S e e t h e P a r a d i s e, and now T h e C o m m i t m e n t s. At least superficially it is hard to find any sort of pattern in these films. This time around he is doing a bittersweet

adaptation of Roddy Doyle's novel about the life and times of Dublin (Ireland)'s first soul band. The idea of an Irish band doing soul makes sense to the band's manager Jimmy Rabbitte (played by Robert Arkins) since he sees himself not just once but triply black. As he says, the Irish are the blacks of Europe, the Dubliners are the blacks of Ireland, and the northern Dubliners are the blacks of Dublin. So he pulls together a band of North Dubliners willing to say they are black and proud of it.

As the film opens, Rabbitte is a hustler of cheap cassettes and T-shirts. His father places Elvis Presley just a bit lower than God and a bit higher than the Pope. With this minimal musical background, after pulling together a rather poor band for a wedding he is struck by the raw singing talent of a drunken guest who grabs the mike and starts belting out a song. With this dubious inspiration he starts to put together a band to feature the singing of Deco Cuffe (played by sixteen-year-old Andres Strong). In addition to Cuffe he finds an off-the-wall drummer, a frustrated jazz musician, and a forty-five-year-old trumpeter who may or may not have played with just about all the American greats. He also finds three feisty female backup singers. From there it is a toss-up if this mismatched group will tear itself apart or become a phenomenon.

The real stars of this film are the music (big surprise) and the hard-edged working-class (and lower) settings in northern Dublin. One might say that the view of living conditions in

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Ireland--with far too many filthy children and with so many of the adults on the dole--by far upstages the foreground story. (This may be more true for me than for other viewers because I do not really know soul music particularly well. I may have missed some of the jokes. On the other hand, a top-of-the-lung belting out of "Try a Little Tenderness" may not have been intended to be as humorous as I found it.)

Some of the humor was a bit derivative and no longer as funny as it might have been. The humorous audition montage is getting over-used after \_ S \_ h \_ e' \_ s \_ G \_ o \_ t \_ t \_ a \_ H \_ a \_ v \_ e \_ I \_ t, \_ T \_ h \_ e \_ P \_ r \_ o \_ d \_ u \_ c \_ e \_ r \_ s, (the underrated)

\_ S\_ o\_ u\_ p\_ f\_ o\_ r\_ O\_ n\_ e, and Robert Kline's (hilarious) "New National Anthem Auditions" routine. The realism of the film is undermined to very little positive effect by a pair of twins who always speak in unison.

\_ T\_ h\_ e\_ C\_ o\_ m\_ m\_ i\_ t\_ m\_ e\_ n\_ t\_ s is a film that is amusing at times and well-textured, but one in which I strongly recommend looking around the characters and watching instead the scenery. For me the film rate a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.