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1. Evelyn has subscribed to a magazine called _K_o_s_h_e_r_G_o_u_r_m_e_t. I

THE MT VOID

Page 2

really love that title. It is similar to the concept of the "Special Olympics." The _K_o_s_h_e_r_G_o_u_r_m_e_t is really an inspirational title. It brings to mind images of people achieving great things in spite of overwhelming handicaps. If someone can keep kosher and still make gourmet meals, I can move mountains. It has been an open secret for years that the most popular Jewish dishes can be found on the menus of Chinese restaurants.

It's not all the fault of kosher, of course. The Jews are an oppressed people. We have developed one good kosher food and it was taken away from us. McDonald's a while back wanted to introduce a new menu item, bagels, and to illustrate it they show a guy in New York ... a black guy. I guess they know that Jews would have better taste in bagels than to get the ones McDonald's would serve. Maybe they can convince someone that bagels are New York black soul food. Or perhaps they figured that the only way to put someone recognizably Jewish on the ad would be to show him in a long coat and hat with a beard and curly sideburns. And the market wasn't ready for that!

Anyway, they succeeded. Or somebody did. My Chinese officemate was asking about Jewish food and I told him bagels were Jewish. "What's Jewish about bagels?" Yeah. What's Chinese about egg rolls?

2. Note that by popular demand, Greg Bear's _E_o_n has been replaced by Robert A. Heinlein's _P_u_p_p_e_t_M_a_s_t_e_r_s on the discussion book list.
[-ecl]

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Hell is yourself. When you ignore other people completely,
that is hell.

-- Tennessee Williams

A WORLD LOST by James B. Johnson
DAW, 1991, ISBN 0-88677-498-5, \$4.50.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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I recently reviewed S. C. Sykes's R_e_d_G_e_n_e_s_i_s and said it was being compared to some of Heinlein's work. Well, if Sykes is writing neo-Heinlein adult novels, Johnson is writing neo-Heinlein juveniles.

Yes, our hero Rusty is supposedly 29 years old, but he acts about half that. (And, no, Rusty does not have a dog named Rin Tin Tin.) He is a spacer at a time when spacers are the outcasts of humanity and arrives home after a trip only to discover that "home" isn't there any more. There is not some mere Wolfeian concept--the whole planet and its sun are gone. So Rusty starts wending his way through a Laumerian bureaucracy to try to get help in finding his planet.

As a juvenile, this book probably passes muster. The strange dietary habits of our hero, centering around peanut butter, seem

aimed far more at an adolescent crowd than a group of adult readers. There are all the stock elements: boy has girlfriend back home to whom he's been engaged since childhood, boy meets beautiful female secret agent, boy and secret agent fight the system to solve the mystery (using boy's spaceship with intelligent talking computer), etc. All the "etc." is predictable too. The science, however, leaves a lot to be desired, even in a juvenile. The Plex Net, a network of matter transmission booths that have all but totally replaced classic (albeit faster-than-light) space travel, is never convincingly explained. On page 35, we find out Rusty is on a planet "a few hundred thousand miles in circumference." This is (conservatively) ten times the circumference of Earth and hence one thousand times the volume. Assuming the same average density, therefore, the gravity would be a hundred times that of Earth (he's ten times further from the center) and, when you add to that the atmospheric pressure you are likely to find, Rusty would be a smudge on the ground. To get Earth's gravity you would need a totally impossible average density. (Conveniently, Saturn has a circumference of slightly more than 200,000 miles, putting it right in the ballpark. Even with the lowest average density of any planet the solar system, Saturn's mass is 95 times that of earth.)

A more serious objection--in terms of what I want young people to learn--is in how Rusty evaluates people. On seeing one up-until-now ambiguous character happily playing with his niece, Rusty says (as first-person narrator), "People with these kinds of values were not inimical to us and the galaxy. Or so I hoped." Even with that qualifier, Johnson seems to have forgotten the lessons of history: "That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain." Many of the Nazi war criminals had very happy, loving home lives.

Okay, maybe all this is overanalytical. As a time-killing book or a juvenile this is okay, but I still can't really recommend it.

THE SCHIZOGENIC MAN by Raymond Harris
Ace, 1990, ISBN 0-441-75398-1, \$3.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
Copyright 1991 Evelyn C. Leeper

I have no idea why this book was written.

Some books are adventure stories. Some have a message. Some

examine philosophical issues. So far as I can tell, this doesn't meet any of these criteria. It's just that while reading it I kept thinking that it was all to no purpose. John Heron, the main character (one hesitates to say "hero") lives in a future city (New York?) in which a lottery regularly reassigns people's roles. As in the song "That's Life," one can end up a puppet, a pauper, a pirate, a poet, a pawn, and a king, as well as just about anything else. (Shades of Jorge Luis Borges's "The Babylonian Lottery" here?) But for some reason Heron is asked to take part in an experiment in which he will dream about ancient Egypt. (The usual scientific hand-waving occurs here.) So Heron dreams, and in his dream changes history by saving Cleopatra's son Kaisarion. (Harris is somewhat idiosyncratic in choosing between Anglicized spellings and "original" spellings of proper names.)

When Heron awakes, however, he discovers the world around him has changed. "Ah," you say, "a classic alternate history plot." Except the changes have little to do with Kaisarion's survival. No Egyptian temples dominate the New City skyline. No Pharaoh rules the land. Some of Heron's friends have different jobs, and he has a different first wife, but that's about the extent of it. History just doesn't work that way.

At any rate, Heron tries (for insufficiently explained reasons) to find his way back to his original starting world by tracing his way down time threads when waking from the "dreams." Classic alternate history rules say this is impossible--one must return u_p_s_t_r_e_a_m of the change in order to return to the unchanged world. But Heron is mostly concerned with finding only one other person unchanged, so maybe it is possible.

But who cares? The external world is affected by Heron's actions but not enough for us to care. And that Heron might or might not find the person he was seeking was a matter of disinterest to me. I kept reading expecting something to develop that would involve me either intellectually or emotionally, but it never did. I suppose the descriptions of life in Cleopatra's Egypt might interest some, but they are not enough to make me recommend the book.

WHORE

A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: In spite of a poor critical reception, W_h_o_r_e is one of Ken Russell's better films. It is one realistic and degrading day in the life of a prostitute. The film is often ugly and bitter, sometimes funny, and almost never erotic. It is a far cry from Ken Russell's earlier film about prostitution, C_r_i_m_e_s_o_f_P_a_s_s_i_o_n. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4).

When the subject of a film is sex, don't trust my opinion. Generally what the critics like, I don't. I thought s_e_x, l_i_e_s & v_i_d_e_o_t_a_p_e was dry and dull. The characters bored me. Yet the film was almost universally applauded by the critics. Generally I am not very impressed by films about sex. Also I am not keen on Ken Russell. Russell is more interested in putting strange images on the screen than he is in telling a story. With the exception of T_h_e_D_e_v_i_l_s and L_a_i_r_o_f_t_h_e_W_h_i_t_e_W_o_r_m, Ken Russell and I don't seem to agree on what makes a good film. W_h_o_r_e is a Ken Russell film about sex and prostitution that has gotten a thumbs-down from most of the critics. That is three strikes against the film. Who knows what possessed me to see the film? Yet once the film started I was totally engrossed by what I was seeing. Admittedly it is cartoonish and some of the scenes do not work. Occasionally Theresa Russell out-and-out misreads lines. Yet there is an undeniable narrative vitality here. Theresa Russell is a frank and vulgar prostitute telling us about her profession as she sees it. If some of her stories seem contrived, it is because that is the way she remembers them.

The film covers a single day in the life of Liz, a prostitute. Initially the film seems nearly plotless. It appears to be just a portrait of the world of the streetwalker. The portrait is pieced together from unconnected incidents punctuated by Liz explaining to the audience what she is thinking and feeling. By the end of the film we are no longer sure that we have not crossed over into a story that Liz is telling herself. Much of the narrative is in Liz's mind and memory anyway. She speaks directly to the camera and it becomes her confidante throughout the day. She tells the camera her past: a horribly failed marriage, how she got into the business of prostitution, how she got a pimp--perhaps more accurately how he got her. And we see a cross-section of customers from gentle to vicious. Ken Russell does have an eye for the ugly!

W_h_o_r_e seems to be a sort of penance on the part of director Ken Russell. His 1984 C_r_i_m_e_s_o_f_P_a_s_s_i_o_n was probably the most positive

view of prostitution since I_r_m_a_l_a_D_o_u_c_e. Kathleen Turner as China Blue found prostitution a creative and fulfilling art that blesses her that gives and him that gets. In the seven years since that film it looks as if someone has been talking to Russell. In W_h_o_r_e prostitution is a living death of being manipulated, lied to, and beaten. Russell drags in every vulgar symbol of sexuality he can muster, yet avoids being erotic. This is a film well-suited to the NC-17 rating.

W_h_o_r_e is an adaptation of a play by David Hines, an English taxi driver who patched together a play based on stories he'd heard from prostitutes who had been his customers. Even as third-hand stories, much of what we have seen is told with skill and ower. I give W_h_o_r_e a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

Chicon V 1991
Con report by Evelyn C. Leeper
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(Part 4 of 4)

Non-Hugo Awards
never

Alas, there was no non-Hugo award ceremony this year. Last year ConFiction arranged a special ceremony for the Gigamesh Awards (Barcelona), Seiun Awards (Japan), King Kong Awards and King Kong Service Medal (The Netherlands), and the ASFA Chesley Awards. Unfortunately, the ceremonies were very poorly attended, even by the European fans, and rumor has it that some of the Japanese contingent left in a huff because the Seiuns (previously awarded at the Hugo Awards ceremony) had been relegated to this separate and largely ignored (by the attendees, anyway) program item. So the rest of the awards disappeared from the programming altogether and the Seiuns were back in the Hugo ceremony. (Best short story in translation was George Alec Effinger's "Schro "dinger's Kitten"; best novel in translation was David

Brin's T_h_e_U_p_l_i_f_t_W_a_r; best dramatic presentation was G_i_n_g_a-U_c_h_u_O_d_y_s_s_e_y

which was scripted by Gregory Benford. Ironically, the Hugo Award ceremony program booklet had a misprint which left "Schro "dinger's Kitten" off and had George Alec Effinger listed as the author of another story which was actually by a different author. There was an announcement of the winners of the Prometheus (Libertarian) Awards in

the daily newsletter; these were awarded Sunday at 6 PM as announced in a small item in the daily newsletter (after being previously announced for Saturday at 5 PM), and the winners were F. Paul Wilson for _ A _ n _ E _ n _ e _ m _ y _ o _ f _ t _ h _ e _ S _ t _ a _ t _ e (Hall of Fame Award) and Michael Flynn for _ I _ n _ t _ h _ e _ C _ o _ u _ n _ t _ r _ y _ o _ f _ t _ h _ e _ B _ l _ i _ n _ d (Best Novel).

Hugo Awards
Sunday, 9 PM

First the awards:

Novel: _ T _ h _ e _ V _ o _ r _ G _ a _ m _ e by Lois McMaster Bujold, Baen Books

Novella: "The Hemingway Hoax" by Joe Haldeman, IASFM April 1990

Novelette: "The Manamouki" by Mike Resnick, IASFM July 1990

Short Story: "Bears Discover Fire" by Terry Bisson, IASFM, August 1990

Non-Fiction Book: _ H _ o _ w _ t _ o _ W _ r _ i _ t _ e _ S _ c _ i _ e _ n _ c _ e _ F _ i _ c _ t _ i _ o _ n _ a _ n _ d _ F _ a _ n _ t _ a _ s _ y by Orson Scott Card, Writer's Digest Books

Chicon V

September 1, 1991

Page 2

Dramatic Presentation: _ E _ d _ w _ a _ r _ d _ S _ c _ i _ s _ s _ o _ r _ h _ a _ n _ d _ s, 20th Century Fox

Professional Artist: Michael Whelan

Professional Editor: Gardner Dozois

Semiprozine: _ L _ o _ c _ u _ s, Charles Brown

Fan Artist: Teddy Harvia

Fan Writer: David Langford

Fanzine: _ L _ a _ n' _ s _ L _ a _ n _ t _ e _ r _ n, George Laskowski

John W. Campbell Award: Julia Ecklar

First Fandom Award: Robert A. W. Lowndes

Big Heart Award: Julius Schwartz

Special Awards: Elst Weinstein for the Hokus, Andrew Porter for

_ S _ c _ i _ e _ n _ c _ e _ F _ i _ c _ t _ i _ o _ n _ C _ h _ r _ o _ n _ i _ c _ l _ e

(The last four are not Hugos.)

Now my comments: At least First Fandom is down to one award per year (over the preceding three years they gave out ten!). Fred Pohl, the presenter, also did us all a favor and named the recipient before giving the biography, which saved us all trying to guess who it was. In Andy Porter's acceptance speech, he said if people wanted to find out what was wrong with the Hugos they should read his next column--a bit ungracious, by most people's comments afterward. I think the biggest surprise was that _ T _ h _ e _ V _ o _ r _ G _ a _ m _ e won, since most people seemed to assume it would be either _ Q _ u _ e _ e _ n _ o _ f _ A _ n _ g _ e _ l _ s or _ E _ a _ r _ t _ h.

The Hugo this year was acrylic on a marble base and designed by Todd Hamilton.

Marta Randall, the mistress of ceremonies, previously held the record for the shortest Hugo Ceremony (90 minutes). She wanted to beat it, but the addition of the Seiun Awards into the ceremony made that impossible. By the way, she referred to the Seiuns as the "Japanese Hugos," an incorrect use of the Hugo name, and I assume the Mark Registration and Protection Committee will mention this to future presenters to avoid this.

Marta Randall also had some humorous comments about the fiction categories, claiming that the short story was the pinnacle of achievement, and developing that theme. For example, when she got to the novelette category, she described a novelette as "the first step of the wholesome all-American short story toward a bloated dekology."

Coincidentally (at least I think it was coincidentally), the presenters got larger in size as the categories increased in word count, a fact that was pointed out with some amusement by George R. R. Martin (the novella presenter): Martin claimed that if this was planned, then Gardner Dozois must be presenting the award for novel (he wasn't). In his acceptance speech for the novella version of "The Hemingway Hoax," Joe Haldeman said that people had asked if they should buy the novel if they already had the novella and he wanted to assure them that the only difference between the novella version and the novel version was that for the novella version he had cut 15,000-20,000 words of explicit sex from the novel. (No one reported if there was a run on the novel in the Dealers' Room the next day.)

After the Hugo Awards ceremony, we proceeded to the parties of the evening. First, of course, we went to the Hugo Losers' party (although a few of the winners snuck in as well). MagiCon gave each nominee a coffee mug inscribed "MagiCon / Hugo Nominees Party / Chicon V / September 1, 1991"; last year Chicon gave out drink coasters with rockets needlepointed on them. At this rate of escalation, I figure the 1995 worldcon will be giving out table service for six and the 1996 one will give you the china cabinet to keep it in. :-) I had a good time talking to people, but the room was much more crowded than the one last year (which had been about four times the size, with fewer attendees). I helped staff the door for a while, since this was a closed party. People seemed determined to crash this party, and tended to arrive in groups, with one program participant (it was open to program participants as well as nominees--maybe this was why it was so crowded) bringing in four "guests." After a couple of minutes, the participant would leave, but the guests would remain. One participant apparently did this twice, but the door crew then decided he was not allowed back a third time even if he was a program participant. Other people said they were just looking for someone, but frequently when we kept an eye on them we discovered them picking up a drink and blending in once they got in. (They were then politely asked to leave.) Perhaps it was the announcement of this as being open to program participants as well that caused the crashers to appear, since that required a much wider publicity than had it been nominees only. (I'm not trying to be a party-pooper here, but MagiCon budgeted for a certain number of attendees, no doubt to give them good feelings about MagiCon and encourage them to be participants there as well, and it isn't fair to MagiCon to ask them to pay for a bunch of other people who are not going to reciprocate. And there were other, open parties.)

After this, we also dropped in on the Phantom of the Opera party. (Actually, Mark spent a fair amount of time here while I returned to the Hugo Losers' party, and he got to talk at length to John Flynn.) Heather Nachman and others had spent a lot of time decorating their room in a "Phantom of the Opera" theme, complete with fallen chandelier. I hope someone took pictures. A lot of people were dressed in suitable costumes (I guess my tuxedo might even count in that category), though again the emphasis was on the Lloyd Webber version. It wins my prizes

as Best Theme Party and Best Decorated Party!

Panel: C C C Ca a a an n n n W W W We e e e

R R R Re e e ea a a ac c c ch h h h

V V V Vi i i in n n ng g g ge e e e' ' 's s s s

S S S Si i i in n n ng g g gu u u ul l l la a a ar r r ri i i it t t ty y y? ? ? ?

T T T Th h h he e e e

M M M Me e e ea a a an n n ni i i in n n ng g g go o o of f f f

E E E Ex x x xp p p po o o on n n ne e e en n n nt t t ti i i ia a a al l l l

P P P Pr r r ro o o og g g gr r r re e e es s s ss s s s

Monday, 1 PM

Dale Skran (mod), Jim Baen, Bill Higgins,

Chip Morningstar, Tom Van Horne

Official Description: "Vernor Vinge suggested that the increase of knowledge and innovation will go ever faster until civilization suddenly breaks through into an unguessable new state. Is this inevitable? Are there forces that will slow progress down? Or will new pressures always arise to increase the pace of change?"

Skran started by pointing out that although this was a panel on Vernor Vinge's Singularity, neither Vinge nor Marc Stiegler (author of "The Gentle Seduction," another work of fiction dealing with the same ideas as Vinge's) was on the panel. Vinge himself has pointed to other works as promoting or using the same idea, notably Greg Bear's _ B _ l _ o _ o _ d _ M _ u _ s _ i _ c.

So what is Vinge's Singularity? Well, the panel did not do a very good job of defining it, but I'll try to summarize what they said. In Vinge's works (_ M _ a _ r _ o _ o _ n _ e _ d _ i _ n _ R _ e _ a _ l _ T _ i _ m _ e and _ T _ h _ e _ P _ e _ a _ c _ e _ W _ a _ r), he has a mechanism that freezes people and their immediate surroundings in "bobbles" in time and eventually they pop out in the far future. A bunch of people who have been through this discover that, as the time they were encapsulated progresses, the technology that they have and understand increases exponentially. That is, while someone encapsulated in 2000 is advanced beyond someone encapsulated in 1995, someone encapsulated in 2001 is even further advanced beyond the 2000 person, and so on. Eventually it is true that a difference of even a few days makes a major difference in level. And one more thing--all human life seems to have disappeared from Earth at a certain point in time (sometime in 2015, I think). This is the Singularity and the

disappearance aspect has led some people to name the Singularity the "Techno-Rapture."

This disappearance is _ n_ o_ t, however, what the panelists were talking about, but rather the notion that technology and knowledge could advance so fast that there would come a time when "all things not impossible are possible" or when people on the other side of the singularity become incomprehensible to us. I'm not sure what this means and clear explanations were not forthcoming. The latter implies that people would "cross" the singularity at different times, but I don't know if that was intended or not. At any rate, to keep _ m_ y terms clear, I will use "singularity" (lower case) to mean the technological break-through and "Singularity" (upper case) to mean the "Techno-Rapture."

Now that you have this definition, you can understand why people in the audience named such works as Arthur C. Clarke's "Nine Billion Names

Chicon V

September 1, 1991

Page 5

of God" and Robert A. Heinlein's "Year of the Jackpot" as having similar themes. (Assuming you've read them, of course, but since they're classics if you haven't read them you should.)

Skran and Higgins started to list eleven forces that could prevent the singularity from happening. This was probably a mistake, since I think many in the audience still didn't have a clear idea of what the singularity was. They got as far as institutional inertia and market inertia before the discussion veered off entirely. One force leading towards the singularity was the increasing speed of communication, mentioned before in many other panels, and which Higgins pointed out meant that "your jokes are [no longer] new to most people." Someone else pointed out that if the singularity was being considered as the knee of the curve in a chart showing exponential growth (which people had referred to earlier), than by changing the scale of the axes you can move the knee around. Do you start your time axis at 1950? 1900? 1500? 5,000,000 B.C.E.? And what is the metric on your "technological" axis? To the Middle Ages, it might have been books printed, but as more and more information becomes electronic this becomes less meaningful. So what is the metric?

Things got fuzzier and fuzzier. Panelists claimed the singularity could be some dramatic increase in intelligence through technology

(sounds almost like Poul Anderson's B_r_a_i_n W_a_v_e--though that didn't use technology--or Daniel Keyes' F_l_o_w_e_r_s f_o_r A_l_g_e_r_n_o_n), or it could be some

simple breakthrough such as happened when people switched from Roman to Arabic numerals. In regard to the former Van Horne pointed out that "before you make someone smarter, you have to understand what makes them smart."

Two more forces opposing the singularity were mentioned (they never got anywhere near listing all eleven): fear of technology and the distraction of virtual realities. The former was hotly discussed, with many people, including some of the panelists, that a fear of technology did not necessarily make someone a mindless Luddite, and that recent events at Three-Mile Island, at Prince William Sound, and at innumerable other places would lead even the most technophilic amongst us to be justifiably wary of unrestrained and uncontrolled technology. As Baen said, "Any technology is dangerous." As the power of the technology increases, its danger also increases, or rather, its potential for damage increases. The complaint (about virtual realities) seemed, to me at least, to be just the latest incarnation of the protests we have seen for thousands of years about how the world is going to hell in a hand-basket. Three generations ago, jazz was ruining the younger generation. Then it was rock 'n' roll and television that were the villains. Then it was video games. Now it's virtual realities, in the form of realistic video games in which you feel as if you are in the game, that will do progress in. I remain skeptical.

The Fermi Paradox was raised. (The Fermi paradox asks why, if the universe is so hospitable to intelligent life, we haven't found any

other intelligent life-forms yet. Why haven't they contacted us?) I forget if there was any connection between this question and the ostensible topic, but Morningstar did have an answer: no one has contacted us because they're all off reading netnews.

Miscellaneous

The hotel had an automatic check-out through the television, but it was not working (or over-loaded). Luckily we had requested a copy of our bill earlier (before breakfast) so we could divide up the cost, so

we were able to just drop off the keys at their "Express Check-Out" and go.

As usual, I'll list the Worldcons I've attended and rank them, best to worst (the middle cluster are pretty close together, and it's getting harder and harder to fit the new ones in, perhaps because the cons of fifteen years ago are hard to remember in detail):

Noreascon II

Noreascon III

Noreascon I (my first Worldcon)

Midamericon (on the basis of the film program, perhaps)

LACon

Chicon V

Discon II

Seacon

Confederation

Chicon IV

ConFiction

Conspiracy (mostly due to hotel problems)

Iguanacon (partially done in, in my opinion, by politics)

Suncon (the location change from Orlando to Miami didn't help)

Nolacon II (extremely disorganized)

Constellation (they over-extended themselves)

In a hard-fought battle, Winnipeg won the bid for 1994. 2107 votes were cast: 1012 for Winnipeg and 957 for Louisville. 719 were mail-in votes and 1388 were cast at Chicon V. It took fourteen hours to count the ballots because Chicon had failed to validate any of the mail-in ballots (verify that each voter was a member of Chicon V and had paid his or her voting fee), or any of the ballots cast at the convention. In addition, it took a while to get a hard-copy of the Chicon V membership list to do validation against. In any case, the results were available in time (though barely) from the Sunday WSFS business meeting. Anne McCaffrey, George Barr, Barry B. Longyear, and Robert Runte are the Guest of Honour. (This switching back and forth between "Honor" and "Honour" is getting to me!) The convention will be called Conadian and be from September 1 through September 5, 1994. Next year's contest is a two-way race for 1995: Atlanta and Glasgow.

Next year in Orlando!

[I would like to add that while I did have videotapes of several of the panels, I decided not to watch them again to write this. There were two reasons for this. The first is that I would need to spend an hour to watch a one-hour panel--one can't skim a videotape. The second is that, given a videotape in front of me, I would have been tempted to be even more thorough, and at 16,000 words, this con report is long enough already!]

THE NEXUS by Mike McQuay
Bantam Spectra Special Edition, 1989, ISBN 0-553-28178-X, \$4.50.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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When television news reporter Denny Stiller first finds Amy Hale, the autistic healer, he sees in her a story and a ladder to success. (I was reminded of Billy Wilder's _ A_ c_ e_ i_ n_ t_ h_ e_ H_ o_ l_ e, though the similarity does not extend much further.) That it takes him, and most of the other characters in the book, as long as it does to realize the extent and implications of Amy's power is a major problem--they have (in the story) days to figure out what the reader has only the time it takes to read a few chapters to do. When everyone does realize the ramifications of this discovery, the novel switches to an atmosphere very similar to Stephen King's _ F_ i_ r_ e_ s_ t_ a_ r_ t_ e_ r, and becomes increasingly less convincing. The machinations of the government, the scheming of the television evangelist, and even the actions of the general public never ring quite true. And the ending is, alas, totally unbelievable. This may be McQuay's major weakness--four years ago when I reviewed his _ M_ e_ m_ o_ r_ i_ e_ s I also noted a tendency toward _ d_ e_ u_ s_ e_ x_ m_ a_ c_ h_ i_ n_ a.

McQuay does use an unusual technique, though. His story is about television newscasting (among other things) and many key scenes, including most of those not involving the main characters, are written as television scripts. This is a bit unnerving at first, as I found myself saying, "But there could possibly have been television cameras present to film this." I'm not sure whether McQuay was commenting on our propensity to accept what we see on television as more real than what we read about, or to underscore how artificial and staged many "impromptu" moments are, or something else entirely.

McQuay has a lot of good observations to make, and takes his pot shots at all the right people (in my opinion), but I never believed his plot and this reduced _ T_ h_ e_ N_ e_ x_ u_ s to a polemic rather than a fully developed novel.

