



symphony, they would play just one movement--presumably a movement that has a familiar melody. This was evidently a concession to listeners who have a short attention span and who want quickly to hear something that they find familiar and can hum. It was probably done for the ex-Top-40 listeners who want to hear the same

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melodies over and over. This would seem to me to be a result of the confusion in many people's minds between appreciating a piece of music and merely knowing what is coming next in a piece of music. If you have heard the same piece of music repetitively, you always know what to expect in the next part. And of course that is what you hear, so you think you are grooving with the music. This is what psychologists call McDonald's Syndrome. Sufferers of McDonald's Syndrome take great pleasure in getting the same hamburger, Coke (tm), and fries anywhere in the country, having music sound the same each time or at least always being familiar, that sort of thing.

Even AT&T has fallen prey to McDonald's Syndrome thinking from time to time. One of its definitions of "quality" is "always meeting customer expectations." "If your customer expects your product to be unreliable, you darn well better make it unreliable if you want quality." This love of repetition led to another phenomenon that had people fooled for a while. The Top 40 listeners would hear the same piece of music so many times that their subconscious would memorize it note for note and play it back for them. These guys would head a piece of music in the heads and would think they were picking up radio waves. For a while it was thought to be some new psychic phenomenon. It was thought some people could pick up radio broadcasts without radio equipment. But no station seems to be playing that music at that time and it never is a piece of music new to the subject.

Occasionally you find classical fans who fall into the cult of repetition and familiarity. That's why you see these albums like "The 632 Most Beloved Melodies." The pieces are about two minutes each. (Hey, how can 632 melodies be "beloved" anyway? How many melodies can you love?) This sort of record is the most popular excerpts from much longer pieces of music. No build-up, no nothing to follow the piece. An entire symphony or opera cut almost too

short to use in a perfume ad. Just the prime part and then moving on to the next. What's wrong with this? Imagine you had a big bowl with samples of the frosting of the 100 best cakes ever made. Can you imagine how disgusting a mess that would be?

What makes good music good is that it takes its time to do things right.

2. PBS has been showing coming attractions for F\_o\_o\_l's\_F\_i\_r\_e, an American Playhouse production of Edgar Allan Poe's "Hop Frog." A word to the wise: the ads make it look pretty good. It looks like a fairly stylized fantasy piece with a nice dark tone. There are some interesting fantasy make-up effects. Channel 13 will run it Wednesday, March 25 at 8 PM and again at midnight. It will probably be run the second week in April on Channel 31.

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THE MISSING MATTER by Thomas R. McDonough  
Bantam Spectra, 1992, ISBN 0-553-29364-8, \$4.99.  
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper  
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This book is sitting on my review stack staring at me, saying, "Okay, now that you've read me, say something about me." The problem is I don't know what to say. (All right, you out there who just said, "But you've never let that stop you before"; I heard that!)

Well, I'll start with basics. This is the third book in the "Next Wave" series packaged by Byron Preiss. Each book consists of a novel based on some hard science concept, prefaced by a short science article on the subject by Isaac Asimov (though his recently-announced retirement may change that), and followed by a somewhat longer science essay by a "real" scientist. The first two novels were R\_e\_d\_G\_e\_n\_e\_s\_i\_s by S. C. Sykes and A\_l\_i\_e\_n\_T\_o\_n\_g\_u\_e by Stephen Leigh. Now, somewhat delayed from its originally announced release date, is the third volume, T\_h\_e\_M\_i\_s\_s\_i\_n\_g\_M\_a\_t\_t\_e\_r by Thomas

R. McDonough.

The science concept behind the novel is that of "black matter," or "missing matter." That is, it has been postulated that there isn't enough matter in the universe to explain the physical laws. So where is this "missing matter"? McDonough s\_e\_e\_m\_s to be saying that it's stuck in parallel universes and that there are planets traveling between (among?) these universes. I say "seems" because none of this was very clearly stated or shown in the novel itself; I conclude this only because of the essays.

And that may be one of the problems with packaging T\_h\_e\_M\_i\_s\_s\_i\_n\_g\_M\_a\_t\_t\_e\_r this way--a perfectly good novel which could stand on its own is turned into a novel appearing to illustrate some point in physics, and not to do it very well. The story is that of a Plutonian colony which discovers a planet moving towards our solar system and sends a team to explore it. Once on the planet, however, the team finds itself traveling between universes, because that's what the planet is doing. It's a good old-fashioned adventure story, with interesting characters (well, okay, the bureaucrat is a bit two-dimensional, but think of her as comic relief), and works far better as a story if you don't try to learn physics from it. As with the others in this series, if you like the sort of science fiction of the 1950s but with better characters and up-to-date (i.e., non-outdated) science, you'll probably enjoy T\_h\_e\_M\_i\_s\_s\_i\_n\_g\_M\_a\_t\_t\_e\_r.

### MY COUSIN VINNY

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: Two boys charged with murder in Alabama are defended by one boy's cousin, a loser played by Joe Pesci. All the stereotyped characters are there, but by the end of the film they have all

become interesting characters. Not great but fun.  
Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4).

Teenagers Bill Gambini (played by Ralph Macchio) and Stan Rothstein (played by Mitchell Whitfield) are driving through Alabama on their way to UCLA. They drive illegally. Bill shoplifts a can of tuna. Then a cop pulls them over. The charge is murder. They need a good lawyer. The lawyer they get is just about the world's worst. Bill's cousin Vinny (played by Joe Pesci) just passed the bar six weeks before on his sixth try. He knows nothing about court procedure, and has never even served in a trial. But he will work free of charge, so down to Alabama he comes with his obnoxious bimbo girlfriend (played by Marisa Tomei). Now Bill and Stan are surrounded by stereotypes: the whiney girlfriend, the redneck cop, the silken, ambitious district attorney, the Southern judge who has pre-judged the case. About the only person who is not a stereotype is Vinny himself. Then something funny happens. The stereotypes start interacting and each becomes an interesting person. Even the trial gets interesting.

Joe Pesci, top-billed for the first time, doesn't quite have enough charisma to carry the film and Marisa Tomei very nearly steals the film from him. Meanwhile Macchio and Whitfield have little to do but stand around and say, "Oh, gee!" And of them, it is the lower-billed Whitfield who has the better role.

The comedy was written by Dale Launer, who also co-produced. This film is on a par with Launer's previous D\_i\_r\_t\_y\_R\_o\_t\_t\_e\_n\_S\_c\_o\_u\_n\_d\_r\_e\_l\_s though neither film is up to his R\_u\_t\_h\_l\_e\_s\_s\_P\_e\_o\_p\_l\_e. M\_y\_C\_o\_u\_s\_i\_n\_V\_i\_n\_n\_y is a bright, pleasant comedy with a slightly distorted view of life in the South. It was directed by Jonathan Lynn, who wrote and directed the hit British comedy series "Yes, Minister" and "Yes, Prime Minister." Pesci's run-ins with the local culture are reminiscent of D\_o\_c\_H\_o\_l\_l\_y\_w\_o\_o\_d, also directed by a Briton. It is almost as if filmmakers are deciding that the rural South has gotten a bad rap in films and are now trying to give it a better image, or at least play off of expectations of the worse image. M\_y\_C\_o\_u\_s\_i\_n\_V\_i\_n\_n\_y is a likeable comedy that delivers at least most of the goods. I rate it a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

LAWNMOWER MAN  
A film review by Mark R. Leeper  
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Capsule review: In L\_a\_w\_n\_m\_o\_w\_e\_r\_M\_a\_n, a mix of virtual reality and mind-expanding drugs turn a mentally retarded handyman into a psychic monster. The film borrows heavily from A\_l\_t\_e\_r\_e\_d\_S\_t\_a\_t\_e\_s, F\_o\_r\_b\_i\_d\_d\_e\_n\_P\_l\_a\_n\_e\_t, and C\_h\_a\_r\_l\_y, and pays back in some nice computer graphics and an over-used revenge plot.  
Rating: +1 (-4 to +4).

Dr. Lawrence Angelo (played by Pierce Brosnan) is one more Stephen King character being exploited by the evil government intelligence agency "The Shop." His experiments with drug-enhancing virtual reality not only make the effect more complete, it may actually be raising the intelligence of his chimpanzee subject. Unfortunately, the chimp does not want to find out. The ape picks the lock of his cage and is killed walking to freedom, zapping humans as he goes. Angelo continues with Jobe (Played by Jeff Fahey), a mentally retarded lawn man.

In over-used King style (perhaps "pseudo-King" since King had little to do with the story in the film), Jobe lives in a world of people willing to torment him because he is so powerless. If only he had the intelligence and power to get back at his tormenters. But then the brain boost he is getting from the ultimate video game and psycho-active drugs starts giving him a super intellect as well as telekinetic powers. As Angelo's wife tells him early in the film, "It may be the future to you, Larry, but it's the same old shit to me." She obviously knows her Stephen King films. Other lines seem downright silly. "He learned Latin in two hours! It took me a year to learn the Latin alphabet." That may well be true, Larry, but I assume you were about four years old at the time.

If the plot is overly predictable--and believe me, it is--the computer graphics are spectacular. They may not always make sense. Jobe's new girlfriend sneaks into the lab to try the virtual reality equipment. While she appears to be the first woman who has been in the lab, the computer knows to visualize her virtual reality body as a female. The computer visuals make one wish this film had been shot in 3-D. Even shot flat, the visuals are quite a trip.

The screenplay is loosely based on the short story by Stephen King. (No, let me correct that: it is tightly based on a Stephen King story title. It has virtually nothing to do with King's story of a lawnman who worships the God Pan.) It was written by the director Brett Lawrence and the producer Gimel Everett. It is dedicated to the memory of the co-producer, the late Milton

Subotsky. Those of you who are fans of British horror film will

remember some classics, particularly anthology films such as T\_h\_e

H\_o\_u\_s\_e T\_h\_a\_t D\_r\_i\_p\_p\_e\_d B\_l\_o\_o\_d,

A\_s\_y\_l\_u\_m, T\_a\_l\_e\_s f\_r\_o\_m t\_h\_e C\_r\_y\_p\_t, and

B\_e\_y\_o\_n\_d

t\_h\_e G\_r\_a\_v\_e that were co-produced in the 1960s by Subotsky for his

production company Amicus Films. His last film was typical for him:

entertaining but not heavy on thought. I would rate L\_a\_w\_n\_m\_o\_w\_e\_r M\_a\_n\_a

+1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

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BARRAYAR by Lois McMaster Bujold  
Baen, 1991, ISBN 0-671-72083-X, \$4.99.

A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

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In this novel, Bujold goes back in time in her saga of Miles Vorkosigan, and relates the events of the period surrounding his birth. As with any book that is part of an on-going series, one must ask of it two questions: how is it as part of the series, and how is it as a stand-alone?

Now, last year's Hugo winner, T\_h\_e V\_o\_r G\_a\_m\_e, was the first of its series that I had read (I don't count F\_a\_l\_l\_i\_n\_g F\_r\_e\_e, although Bujold includes it in her timeline, because it far predates Miles), and I felt it stood well enough on its own that I had no problems with its winning the Hugo. I would assume that to those who had read the other novels (some of which cover events before T\_h\_e V\_o\_r G\_a\_m\_e, some after--a complete timeline is provided in each new book) enjoyed it even more. But B\_a\_r\_r\_a\_y\_a\_r is not as satisfying as a stand-alone; much of the interest in the events is based on the knowledge of Miles's future. Since all the blurbs, etc., reveal that Miles goes on further adventures, his survival is never in

question, and the book's attempt to add tension here is somewhat annoying. (True, one can't blame an author for the blurbs, but surely Bujold must have realized that most readers would know the outcome even if they hadn't read any other works in the series.)

Given all this, however, I think that for people who have read other works in the series--even just one--this book is very enjoyable and enlightening. It provides background and context for Miles which help show the forces that shaped him, both physically and emotionally. And it makes me want to read the other books in the series, which is perhaps the ultimate test, and why I recommend this (though I suggest reading  T \_ h \_ e \_ V \_ o \_ r \_ G \_ a \_ m \_ e  first).