



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
Club Notice - 08/28/92 -- Vol. 11, No. 9

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are on Wednesdays at noon.

 D A T E T O P I C

09/16 HO: THE SILMARILLION by J.R.R. Tolkien (Alternate Mythologies)
(HO 4N-509)

10/07 HO: THE FORGE OF GOD and THE ANVIL OF STARS by Greg Bear
(The Fermi Paradox) (HO 4N-509)

10/28 HO: Book Swap (HO 4N-509)

11/18 HO: DOOMSDAY BOOK by Connie Willis (Plagues) (HO 4N-509)

12/09 HO: A FIRE ON THE DEEP by Vernor Vinge (HO 4N-509)

 D A T E E X T E R N A L
 M E E T I N G S / C O N V E N T I O N S / E T C.

09/12 SFABC: Science Fiction Association of Bergen County: Michael
Kandel (author) (phone 201-933-2724 for details)
(Saturday)

09/19 NJSFS: New Jersey Science Fiction Society: TBA
(phone 201-432-5965 for details) (Saturday)

HO Chair: John Jetzt HO 1E-525 908-834-1563 hocpb!jetzt
LZ Chair: Rob Mitchell HO 1D-505A 908-834-1267 hocpb!jrrt
MT Chair: Mark Leeper MT 3D-441 908-957-5619 mtgzy!leeper
HO Librarian: Nick Sauer HO 4F-427 908-949-7076 homxc!11366ns
LZ Librarian: Lance Larsen LZ 3L-312 908-576-3346 mtfme!lfl
MT Librarian: Mark Leeper MT 3D-441 908-957-5619 mtgzy!leeper
Factotum: Evelyn Leeper MT 1F-329 908-957-2070 mtgzy!ecl
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1. Sorry, you are not an instant winner. But thank you for playing.

2. Like most American men I tend to dread opening a new shirt. There are a number of reasons why people hate the first wearing of

a new shirt. Of course, the first one is the social stigma. In order to make the shirt look nice in the package, they put something into it called shortening or sizing or something. Anyway, it is intended to make the shirt look just gorgeous in the package even if the shirt will after washing look like a fugitive from a steam grate. I think this stuff they put in shirts was invented by Mary Kay Cosmetics.

THE MT VOID

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Then, of course, there's the danger to life and limb provided by the pins in the shirt. They were always pretty scary, even in the days before AIDS. But more recently they have gotten a lot worse. They put little plastic heads on those babies to make them blend in with the shirt. They apparently finally acted on this suggestion which had been kicking around since 1965, when it was suggested by a Mr. Nguyen Tran of Hanoi, North Vietnam. Only a camouflage expert these days can actually find and remove every one of these little beauties before actually putting on the shirt. Of course, then they either rip holes in the shirt or stab the unwary customer.

But the main thing I want to tell you about is those little slips that say, "Inspected by #52." How do you interpret that? I mean, I know you know what "inspected" means, but what do you know about #52? Just how good is he (actually in this case, she). Well, so far the government has protected the shirt industry's right not to tell the public, but my staff of spies have collected the following information, exclusive to readers of the MT VOID.

#5, #33, #52, #56, #57, and #67 are all pretty good. #63 is also unless you get him on a Friday afternoon.

#36 drinks on the job. Try to avoid shirts she has inspected.

#25 is really good, in more ways than one apparently. He stole #44's wife. There are rumors about romantic weekends in Racine. #44's work has declined but, even worse, he has taken to sticking pencil holes in shirts after #25 has inspected them. Best not to get involved with either of them.

As their low numbers suggest, #3 and #16 have been on the job a long time. They met and fell in love on the job. Their work was

once good, but their daughter, the former #74, after inspecting for only six months, ran off to become a groupie for Iron Maiden. Well, not much of a loss, because she never got the hang of inspecting pocket stitching, but she broke #3's and #16's hearts. They just don't have their hearts in inspecting shirts anymore.

#28 had printed up his own counterfeit "Inspected by #23 slips." Why, I don't know. Informed sources say there isn't much difference in the quality of their work. It sort of became an industry joke. I will continue to investigate.

Nobody would talk to us about #49.

Mark Leeper
MT 3D-441 908-957-5619
...mtgzy!leeper

I can respect the men who argue that religion is true and therefore ought to be believed, but I can only feel profound moral reprobation for those that say that religion ought to be believed because it is useful, and that to ask whether it is true is a waste of time.

-- Bertrand Russell

STARFARERS by Vonda N. McIntyre
Ace, 1989, ISBN 0-441-78053-9, \$3.95.

TRANSITION by Vonda N. McIntyre
Bantam Spectra, 1991, ISBN 0-553-28850-4, \$4.95.

METAPHASE by Vonda N. McIntyre
Bantam Spectra, 1992, ISBN 0-553-29223-4, \$4.99.

Book reviews by Evelyn C. Leeper

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Ursula K. LeGuin describes this as "the most important series in science fiction." It's not that good, but the series does have a lot to offer. It's a mix of old-time space opera/alien contact with modern-day politics and futuristic sensibilities thrown in. (It is similar to some of Michael Kube-McDowell's works in this regard.) This is a mixed blessing. While I think it's a good thing to have alternate family structures in a novel set in the future (the Republican Convention notwithstanding!), I found the picture here overly optimistic in their acceptance. And would _ a_ l_ l the main characters be bisexual? In spite of my reservations about the total

believability of this, I found the characters to be complex and fleshed out enough to be involving rather than just vehicles for the alien contact plot. And the ship and its adventures bring back some of that sense of wonder from the old space operas.

In Starfarers we meet the crew of the Starfarer, Earth's first interstellar craft (and biosphere). Earth politicians are trying to convert the craft to military use, so the crew decides to leave by jumping into another star system by following cosmic thread before this can happen. In the process, they take along a few unwilling "crew members" who happened to be there when the ship had to leave. Oh, and Earth has fired an atomic warhead at them and their artificial intelligence net has been sabotaged....

It's not spoiler to say that they solve these problems--if they hadn't there wouldn't be Transition and Metaphase.
In Transition the Starfarer meets aliens (sort of) and again has its net sabotaged, and ends by having to jump to yet another star system or be stranded.... In Metaphase there are yet more adventures, the alien squidmoth, and a jump to another star system at the end....

If by now you see a certain cyclic nature to the series, you're right. To call this a series is, to my mind, inaccurate. It's a single story of as yet indeterminate length, with each book picking up where the previous one has left off. So unlike some other series (such as Bujold's "Barrayar" or McCaffrey's "Dragon" series), you cannot read individual books or read the books out of order. (Well, you can, but it would be like reading the chapters in a novel in random order, and the story would not be the better for it.) Strangely enough, it also reads like something that would show up on

television, though television tends to stay away from series in which the order matters--it's harder to syndicate them after their first run. Still, the limited set of main characters, the episodic nature of their adventures (combined with the on-going theme of exploration), and so on make me wonder if this isn't at least influenced by the structure of television series. (McIntyre is no stranger to television-related material, having written several "Star Trek" novels.)

So my recommendation on this has to be somewhat tempered by the fact that this is an open-ended series. If you like your stories to have a beginning, a middle, and an end, this is probably not for you. The "Starfarers" has a beginning, a lot of middle, and no end in sight. If you can accept that structure, I would recommend the series.

RAISING CAIN
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: Bizarre Gratia Bizarre. Brian De Palma directs his own not-ready-for-primetime script. He sew together big swaths from P_e_e_p_i_n_g_T_o_m, P_s_y_c_h_o, and others, then does not have the plot thread to hold them together in a decent story. Very much a lesser effort of a decent filmmaker. Rating: low 0 (-4 to +4). (Warning: some spoilers occur in this review.)

At one point Brian De Palma was a clever and innovative filmmaker. P_h_a_n_t_o_m_o_f_t_h_e_P_a_r_a_d_i_s_e is a terrific t_o_u_r_d_e_f_o_r_c_e. Arguably it was De Palma who put Stephen King on the map with his excellent adaptation of C_a_r_r_i_e. De Palma also proved he could do Hitchcock thrillers as well as Hitchcock himself. In fact, when De Palma's O_b_s_e_s_s_i_o_n played concurrently with Hitchcock's F_a_m_i_l_y_P_l_o_t, I claimed it was O_b_s_e_s_s_i_o_n that Hitchcock should have been prouder of. I also think that in spite of some of the obvious faults, S_c_a_r_f_a_c_e is probably the most exciting gangster film of the last ten years. But De Palma borrowed too often from Hitchcock, and his films like B_o_d_y_D_o_u_b_l_e became too predictable. Also he was the wrong director for B_o_n_f_i_r_e_o_f_t_h_e_V_a_n_i_t_i_e_s. You have to be very careful giving an escapist director a film of social comment. Now he is back with a non-Hitchcockian thriller that he wrote himself, but he is making a mess of things. (It may be overstating things to call it his script; De Palma heavily plunders other films such as S_y_b_i_l and P_e_e_p_i_n_g_T_o_m.)

Carter Nix (played by John Lithgow) is a child psychologist who so loves his baby daughter that he has taken two years off of his practice just to study her. In fact, he constantly has cameras on her so that she never has a private moment. (Yes, a directed steal from Michael Powell's P_e_e_p_i_n_g_T_o_m.) But we find out very quickly that Carter is stealing babies for a psychological experiment. His wife Jenny (played by Lolita Davidovich) knows nothing of this and is carrying on her own secret life (with the accent on "carrying on"). The first mild absurdity happens in the first sixty seconds of the film, when a friend (played by Teri Austin) offers Carter and daughter a ride and just happens to have a spare baby seat in the car. This is only a tiny absurdity and De Palma could have explained it, but chose not to in order to condition the viewer to accept larger and larger absurdities without explanation. The

climax of the film is a flabbergasting lulu requiring precise split-second timing to convince the audience that no events as shown could ever occur on planet Earth.

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De Palma's script makes clear that he did not have enough story to fill a film. While the R_a_i_s_i_n_g_C_a_i_n length of 97 minutes is not actually outlandishly short, the film is only that long due to a lengthy sequence that is nothing but a throwaway adding zilch to the story but a gratuitous car accident. At some point this film was probably written to be a t_o_u_r_d_e_f_o_r_c_e for John Lithgow playing multiple roles, but in fact he just gives weak impressions of James Spader and Max Von Sydow (with exaggerated Swedish accent while playing a Norwegian). This new film makes De Palma appear to be no so much raising cain as just being less able. I rate it a low 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.

