



In the "Unthinking Deeps" no civilization can arise; real intelligence is simply impossible. Woe betide the ships that wander here! In the "Slow Zone" thought is possible, as well as simple computers, but faster than light travel is not. In the

THE MT VOID

Page 2

"Beyond," computers and minds work much better, and "ultra-drive" works. Finally, in the "Transcend," it is possible to achieve transcendence and vanish from the ken of lesser beings.

On this canvas Vinge spins a tale of pack-intelligences and little boys, of a woman who survived the murder of billions and a man who was godshatter, of a Power who learned too late that there are always the greater and the lessor, of a hollowed-eyed crew lusting for vengeance the heroism of the tool of an ancient evil, and of the courage of a young girl. By showing us this unlikely caravan of miracles, Vinge is reminding us of just how strange the universe may yet be! There are even those, such a Roger Penrose (T\_h\_e\_E\_m\_p\_e\_r\_o\_r's\_N\_e\_w\_M\_i\_n\_d), who believe that thought and consciousness may have a quantum mechanical component. And if it did, is it impossible that the subtle twisting of spacetime by the black hole at the center of the galaxy might, just might have some effect on thought--human and machine? [-dls]

2. Every once in a while I like to take different hare-brained scientific speculations and see if they fit together. Let me bounce this one off you and see if anybody has a comment. A while back I observed that flying seems to be an almost universal fascination with humans. It gets manifested in different ways with different people, but a majority of the world's population exhibits some fascination with flight. It doesn't have to be aircraft enthusiasm, though that counts. Some people like to dabble in paper airplanes, some in hot air balloons. Some people like to watch birds or bats or insects in flight. Kites are popular all over much of the world. Pretty much anyone like to play with helium balloons and lots like to build models of aircraft. We make folk heroes of Superman, Peter Pan, Steve Canyon, Mighty Mouse, Captain Midnight, Flash Gordon, Buck Rogers, and Spaceman Spiff. Earlier I suggested that this inbred fascination with flight was a rebellion against being able to see in three dimensions but walk

only in two, but maybe that's not true. Maybe we think so much about flight because our bodies are equipped for it. Maybe for part of our development as a species we c\_o\_u\_l\_d move in three dimensions and now somehow miss it.

Am I suggesting that at some point in human evolution we were a primate who could fly? Well, perhaps. Did we have feathers? No. But take a look at how you do look and act differently from most primates. We are not covered with hair like other primates, though if you look at Alec Baldwin's chest (or my father's) you see some have not lost it entirely. But most of us are covered with only very sparse hair. Our most common sex position is front-to-front, while other primates do it front-to-back. And we have elevated intelligence. These characteristics are unusual among land mammals., but are actually common among aquatic mammals. The theory has been suggested that at some point in our development we were aquatic apes.

THE MT VOID

Page 3

The concept of aquatic apes sounds strange at first, but of course so does that of aquatic lizards. And we did see aquatic lizards in the Galapagos. It has been seriously suggested by reputable scientists (how should I know who? I heard this quite a while back!) that what sets humans apart from other primates is that we spent some time developing in water.

Now let's tie the two ideas together. Could it be that the reason the dream of flight is so widespread is that it is a lost facility to move about in three dimensions? Aquatic animals do have a form of flight. They do move in three dimensions. The medium just is not air. They glide about--over and under each other--in water. Whales, porpoises, and otters glide very gracefully in three dimensions. It is an experience for which we could still be prepared psychologically, but physically it might be impossible.

What do you folks think? I'll listen to arguments that I'm all wet.

Mark Leeper  
MT 3D-441 908-957-5619

...mtgzfs3!leeper

The multitude of books is making us ignorant.  
-- Voltaire

### ALADDIN

A film review by Mark R. Leeper  
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Capsule review: Good animation but an otherwise very bad non-telling of the story of Aladdin and the wonderful lamp. The story has little to do with the Arabian Nights tale and even that story keeps being

derailed by Robin Williams's much too topical humor.

This film is many cuts below B\_e\_a\_u\_t\_y\_a\_n\_d\_t\_h\_e\_B\_e\_a\_s\_t.

Rating: 0 (-4 to +4).

I am not a great fan of the animated versions of fairy tales and, in this case, Arabian Nights tales, as produced by Disney Studios. I frankly questioned that proclivity when I saw B\_e\_a\_u\_t\_y\_a\_n\_d\_t\_h\_e\_B\_e\_a\_s\_t just about a year ago. It seemed to me at that point Disney (the studio, not the man) had learned how to tell a story with complexity and one that worked on multiple levels. B\_e\_a\_u\_t\_y\_a\_n\_d\_t\_h\_e\_B\_e\_a\_s\_t, it seemed to me, was a film that said something about the human condition. Now the same company makes A\_l\_a\_d\_d\_i\_n. Is it as good as B\_e\_a\_u\_t\_y? Try asking if it is even as good as T\_h\_e\_L\_i\_t\_t\_l\_e\_M\_e\_r\_m\_a\_i\_d. This one is a solid disappointment.

Let us start with the story. I think we all know the story of Aladdin, right? Good. Will somebody tell it to the good folks at Disney, please. Disney is often less than faithful to source material. In this case perhaps one or two scenes of the story made it to the film. The screenplay by Ron Clements and John Musker (who also produced and directed) in fact is almost a reasonable version of the modern story "The Thief of Baghdad." The setting has been moved from China to Arabia for reasons best know to Clements and Musker. In this version Aladdin falls in love with the princess of Aqaba and sets out to win her. Even telling that story would not have been a bad idea, but the film goes desperately wrong with its use of Robin Williams as the genie of the lamp. When the genie is on the screen we go from the usual timeless story-telling to a bunch of topical allusions that may be amusing on first viewing, but will not be a second time. Williams lampoons Arnold Schwarzenegger, William F. Buckley, Jack Nicholson, Robert DeNiro, Groucho Marx, and a host of other celebrities. Williams totally derails any style that the film has been able to build up. The story-telling often just stops dead as Williams does his thing or the film goes off into slapstick.

At least there is something positive to say about the art and animation, some of which is actually quite nice. There is a cave whose mouth is the head of a tiger that is both well drawn and well animated. Backgrounds are intentionally blurred and then focused sharply to shift the eye of the viewer and give a feeling of depth. There is a very nice sequence involving a rolling cylinder--I will not describe how it fits into the plot. The animation is sufficient but the extremely uneven tone and the almost total lack of fidelity to the story make this a lesser effort from Disney. My rating is 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.

MALCOLM X  
A film review by Mark R. Leeper  
Copyright 1992 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: Spike Lee has brought T\_h\_e  
A\_u\_t\_o\_b\_i\_o\_g\_r\_a\_p\_h\_y\_o\_f\_M\_a\_l\_c\_o\_l\_m\_X to the screen in a film of  
large virtues and large faults. We get some feel for  
the sweep of historic events and a feel for how  
Malcolm's views were transformed over time, but we  
get insufficient views of his beliefs at any point in  
time, nor which set of his beliefs the film is  
championing when it champions him. Rating: +1 (-4 to  
+4).

Spike Lee's M\_a\_l\_c\_o\_l\_m\_X is a mammoth 201-minute film about the  
black Islamic leader that may not always be doing what Lee intended  
it to do. The film does say a lot about Malcolm, both positive and  
negative, but not nearly as much as one would expect for a film  
almost twice the length of most feature films. The film tells in  
approximately equal thirds about 1) his youth and his drift into  
crime; 2) his "redemption" and his association with the Nation of  
Islam; and 3) his break with the Nation of Islam, their campaign  
against him, and his murder, very likely at their hands. This  
should have given the audience a very good understanding of the man,  
but the screenplay by Arnold Perl and Spike Lee does not use its  
time well. At one point it stops the action dead for an extended  
dance production number. It also spends far too much time with  
Malcolm X's great good buddy, Shorty, who just happens to be played  
by Spike Lee. In addition, many of the events shown in the film are  
of questionable authenticity. For example, my understanding is that  
Malcolm's mother denies that her husband was murdered, unlike how it  
was shown in the film.

The film opens with Malcolm's youth. Malcolm (played by Denzel  
Washington) begins as a teenager trying to straighten his hair with  
the help of Shorty. The film then jumps around in time, never  
giving us a really good feel for what years things are taking place.  
We see something of his earlier youth with his family harassed by  
the Ku Klux Klan. Those scenes include one amazing shot that  
ironically seems to romanticize the Klan, riding off into a huge  
moon on the horizon. Again it is a sign that Lee is not fully in  
control of this film. Malcolm eventually moves first to Boston,  
then New York, then Boston again, embarking on a life of crime cut  
short by a prison sentence.

In prison, Malcolm is recruited by Baines (played by Albert  
Hall) for the Nation of Islam. Malcolm is impressed by Baines's  
questionable rhetoric. (His description of why Muslims eat no pork  
is a real corker! As for his claims that Islam has a great in-built

respect for blacks as people... am I the only person who remembers there was a huge Arab slave trade in Africa even well after slavery was abolished in Europe and the Americas? In fact, I believe that the reason Swahili is still so widespread in Africa is that it was the language created from Bantu and Arabic for the Arab slave trade. That fact just does not seem to square with a large black movement to champion Islam.) Malcolm leaves prison with an abiding belief in Elijah Muhammad--very well-played by Al Freeman, Jr., who played Malcolm X in R\_o\_o\_t\_s\_I\_I--and in the precept that all whites are devils.

The film than covers Malcolm's rise to and fall from power in Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam. Here it becomes unclear exactly what the film's attitude toward the Nation of Islam is. While Malcolm appears in some ways to be doing very positive things, he behaves and presents his viewpoints very differently in front of blacks than in front of whites. Lee seems to be attacking the Nation of Islam for hypocrisy. Eventually when Malcolm starts presenting the same vitriolic message to the whites that he was giving to the blacks, it starts the rift between Malcolm and the Nation of Islam. It may be hard for much of the audience to cheer statements like, "The Earth belongs to us ... the black man," or banners that say, "We must protect our most valuable property ... our women." Malcolm also rejects integration entirely in favor of complete separation between the black and white races.

In the final third of the film, Malcolm's views shift entirely. He is no longer an advocate of racial separation, but of racial harmony through Islam. He is willing to accept that there may be good whites in the world, as long as they are also good Muslims. He is no longer willing to follow Elijah Muhammad and founds his own rival Muslim black sect. This leads to the tragic events of which the audience is probably already aware.

The film concludes by showing documentary footage of the real Malcolm X. Often historical films shy away from showing documentary footage of characters they have portrayed by actors. Perhaps it is to avoid confusion about if it is indeed the same person. Or perhaps showing the footage would be inviting criticism of how well or badly the actor was made to look like the actual person. Lee's

use of real footage of Malcolm X shows that assumption may well be underestimating the audience. After the footage, several black celebrities are seen wearing caps bearing the "X," though it is not clear which set of Malcolm X's sets of beliefs they are claiming to espouse.

The performances in M\_a\_l\_c\_o\_l\_m\_X are generally quite good. Denzel Washington very quickly becomes Malcolm X for the audience. Al Freeman, Jr., is very believable as the founder of a huge movement. Angela Bassett and Lonette McKee are both very moving as Malcolm's wife and mother, respectively. Only notably out of place is Spike

Malcolm X

November 29, 1992

Page 3

Lee himself playing basically the same jazzy character he played in S\_h\_e'\_s\_G\_o\_t\_t\_a\_H\_a\_v\_e\_I\_t, or comically fainting on hearing his prison sentence. There is much he could have cut from the film to actually improve its effectiveness and his own performance heads the list.

M\_a\_l\_c\_o\_l\_m\_X teaches some history and presents some ideas, but does neither well enough to justify its length and hoopla. Lee's dream project falls short of some of the films he made preparing for it. I rate M\_a\_l\_c\_o\_l\_m\_X a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.



THE COLLECTED STORIES OF ROBERT SILVERBERG, VOLUME 1: SECRET SHARERS

Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-37068-5, 1992, \$12.50.

A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

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The title of this volume would lead the reader to expect stories from Silverberg's early period, but in fact they are from between November 1981 and September 1988. Even the previous collection, T\_h\_e\_C\_o\_n\_g\_l\_o\_m\_e\_r\_o\_i\_d\_C\_o\_c\_k\_t\_a\_i\_l\_P\_a\_r\_t\_y (1984), consists entirely of post-1980 works. So I have no idea why this is labeled "Volume 1." (The fact that the introduction is dated over two years ago, and the page headers are incorrect for a few pages around page 330 make me wonder even more about the history of this book.)

Still, it has twenty-four pieces of Robert Silverberg's short fiction (short stories, novelettes, and novellas), including several award winners and nominees. Though it omits "Gilgamesh in the Outback" (already included in T\_o\_t\_h\_e\_L\_a\_n\_d\_o\_f\_t\_h\_e\_L\_i\_v\_i\_n\_g), it includes "Sailing to Byzantium"; "Enter a Soldier, Later: Enter Another"; and "A Sleep and a Forgetting." I see no point in giving a detailed review of each story--they're by Silverberg and Silverberg hasn't written a bad story in years--certainly not since he was turning them out two a week, and possibly not even then. Here you have two dozen previously uncollected Silverberg stories for fifty cents each--what more could you ask for? Highly recommended.

SPEAKING IN TONGUES by Ian McDonald  
Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-29239-0, 1992, \$4.99.

Since this is a Bantam Spectra book, I suppose it goes without saying that McDonald's inspirations are not those writers of "Campbellian workmanlike prose" who appeared in the old A s t o u n d i n gs, but rather such sources as Yeats and Joyce. The result is stories that focus more on style and language than on plot or hard science fiction ideas. McDonald also uses the Third World ambiance of "cyberpunk." His stories don't take place in New York or London or Amsterdam--they are about Hy Brazyl and Dahomy and Penang and Nairobi. Not that all this is bad, but you should know what you're getting.

"Gardenias," for example, is about the use of a matter transmitter to achieve a new spiritual plane. The matter transmitter makes the story sound like hard science fiction, but McDonald is writing atmosphere, not technical details. The neo-Latin world is more fully realized than the device. The same is true of the dry desert world of "Rainmaker Cometh," the isolated world of "Listen," the 1930s Germany of "Fragments of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria," the Caribbean world of "Atomic Avenue," even the Borgesian hyperbolic world of "Approaching Perpendicular."

Only in a few stories does the plot overcome the background to stand out. In "Floating Dogs," enhanced animals fulfill their destiny in carrying out the designs of their creators. In "Fronds," we see the clash of species in conflict--the advancement of one will cause the death of another. Ironically, even though this has the strongest plot, it may be the weakest story, because the plot--even to its use of dolphins as another sentient species--is by now familiar to most readers. And "Winning," another plot-oriented story (or perhaps character-oriented), just made me think, "I've seen all this in a movie. An Academy-Award-winning movie, true, but still...."

"Toward Kilimanjaro" is the best example of McDonald's strengths and weaknesses. When he is putting the reader in the encroaching plastic jungle, he is excellent; when he gets into the specifics of what is happening, he falters badly. Is this new life form indigenous or alien? McDonald wants it both ways. And it is impossible for biological entities to develop wheels (see Stephen Jay Gould's essay "Kingdoms Without Wheels" in H e n' s T e e t h a n d H o r s e' s T o e s).

Still, McDonald's skills as a stylist overcome the flaws and familiarities in plot that he occasionally falls into. S p e a k i n g i n

T o n g u e s is not for everyone, but for those pursuing the literary branch of science fiction and fantasy, this is recommended.

(I must make one minor complaint against Bantam: they chose to use the book title for the page header rather than the individual story titles. This makes it impossible to flip through to find a particular story--most annoying.)

