

day, they fed it, and the cat knew he or she had found a new home. I never thought the experience would happen to me. First of all we all know about cats, they make messes, they break things, their food smells awful, and they have no conscience. For all these reasons I decided I would never have a cat. Now I have been

THE MT VOID

Page 2

adopted by Caprice and as far as I am concerned she can stay as long as she would like.

I was just startled one morning to find Caprice. She found her own way into the house. One moment I didn't have a pet, the next there she was running across the floor. She might not appeal to some but she has dainty little features. And she is very shy. She avoids people, which is probably just as well. But she makes no messes. She leaves no bad smells. Most of the time you don't even know she's around. Apparently she feeds herself. At least the ants we had in the house a month or so ago don't seem to show up anymore. And that is a big advantage over something like a cat that, as I said, makes messes and bad smells. Caprice is small but very effective at keeping the ant population down. I would guess she is no more than an inch and a half in diameter with her legs out. I am guessing Caprice is a she, though I have not found a commensurately-sized web.

In any case, if you come visiting, please keep an eye out not to step on Caprice. I have no idea how I'd replace her.

2. I recently reviewed Babylon 5 and found that while the single episode was not all that interesting, there were a lot of very interesting unanswered questions. The following was found on the net:

J Michael Straczynski, the creator of Babylon 5, wanted this posted far and wide. So here it is.

=====
sf/babylon5 #452, from straczynski, 9907 chars, Mon Feb 22 00:43:04 1993

This is a comment to message 451.

There is/are comment(s) on this message.

The following is uploaded with the request that, if you support what appears below, it be further uploaded to other BBSs...local, regional, national...relay nets and networks.

First, a brief aside:

It's generally recognized that there would not have been a third season of the original Trek series had it not been for the action of science fiction fans across the country who, seeing in that program something they liked, wrote to the network to keep the show on the air. Their voices were heard, and the show stayed on the air for one more season.

That's the part everyone knows. What's not generally considered outside the Television Industry are all of the ramifications of that action.

THE MT VOID

Page 3

At two seasons, a little over 50 episodes, there were not nearly enough episodes to go into general syndication. At two seasons, the show would have been bought as a package by fewer stations, would have popped up far less often on television sets subsequent to the original series' cancellation. It's altogether possible that it might not have shown up at all, and been consigned to the NBC vaults on the grounds of insufficient episodes for syndication marketing. (It happens; how many episodes of Captain Nice have you seen lately?)

With that third season, there were finally enough episodes on hand to go into general syndication.

And it was in syndication that Star Trek gradually built up the viewership and the popularity that led to conventions, that resulted in a generation of viewers to whom the term "Klingon" was not some obscure reference but a part of American popular culture. Without that third season, the Star Trek phenomenon would never have had a chance to grow.

There would have been no new novels, no animated series, no role playing games, no Star Trek I, II, III, IV, V or VI. There would

have been no Next Generation or any other subsequent series.

All of that...ALL of that...happened because concerned viewers took a moment to voice their opinions to those who were in a position to listen, and to act upon those opinions.

Now...what does this have to do with Babylon 5?

Some of you have seen it. Many more of you are about to see it. Throughout the year-plus that I've been talking about this show at conventions and on the computer nets, I've emphasized a number of agendas: our desire to Get It Right; to avoid shilling and lying to fans, as is so often done by producers eager to cash in on *SCI-FI*; and our intention to do intelligent stories with interesting characters.

And there's one other item: I've said, time and again, not to believe any of the hype, but rather to trust to your own considered instincts. And it is that subject which is the point of this essay. You now have the opportunity to judge our efforts for yourself.

Babylon 5, as it stands in its present form, as a pilot, is the first time that the crew, the cast, the director and others have come together. Four weeks of shooting, two days of rehearsal, and a budget roughly *ONE-FOURTH* that of DS9's pilot. As has been stated from the very beginning, it has all the flaws you would expect of a new project, in which people have to act together for the first time, sets may or may not be all perfect, and the bugs

THE MT VOID

Page 4

are still being worked out. That's what a pilot is for, to try things, see what works, adjust, and move on.

The fundamental question behind Babylon 5 comes down to this: do you like what you see? Does it make you want to see more? Have we kept our promise as far as what was actually *delivered* in the pilot?

Because there *is* more to come. There has always been a plan for a series to follow. If anything, that was the point of the entire

exercise...to tell a story. To create a novel for TV that would span five years, for which the pilot is the opening chapter. Having now seen, or about to see the foundation for that story, and before being asked to lend support to that series, you have a right to some sense of what that series would entail, and what you're being asked to support. One should never sign a blank check on the bank of one's conscience. So here's a preview.

You will find out what happened to Sinclair, for starters, during the Earth/Minbari war. For nearly 10 years, Sinclair has worked to convince himself that nothing happened to him on the Line other than what seems to be the case: that he blacked out for 24 hours. He's just managed to convince himself of this. Now, suddenly, someone comes into his life and with seven words -- you'll know them when you hear them -- completely unravels the self-deception. He knows then that something DID happen to him, that someone DID mess with his mind...and he is going to find out who, and why.

The ramifications of that discovery will have a major influence on the series, on his relationships, and the future of not only his character but many others.

You will see what a Vorlon is...and what it represents. And what it may have to do with our own saga, and a hidden relationship to some of our other characters (watch the reception scene carefully). We'll discover that there are MANY players in this game. You'll find out what happened to Babylon 4, and it will call into question what is real, what is not, and the ending of that episode is one that you have not seen before on television.

We'll find that most every major character is running to, or away from something in their hearts, or their pasts, or their careers. Garibaldi's checkered past will catch up with him in a way that will affect his role and make him a very different character for as much as a full season, and have lasting effects thereafter. Lyta will take part in a voyage of discovery that will very much change her character. She will be caught up in a web of intrigue and forced to betray the very people she has come to care for.

We will see wheels within wheels, discover the secret groups behind the Earth and Minbari governments who suspect, with good reason,

that one of the B5 crew may be a traitor, who sold out Earth during the Earth/Minbari war.

Some of the established empires in the pilot will fall. Some will rise unexpectedly. Hopes and fortunes will be alternately made or destroyed. At least one major race not yet known even to EXIST will make its presence known, but only gradually. Some characters will fall from grace. Others will make bargains whose full price they do not understand...but will eventually come to realize, and regret.

At the end of the first season, one character will undergo a MAJOR change, which will start the show spinning on a very different axis. The first season will have some fairly conventional stories, but others will start the show gradually moving toward where I want it to go. One has to set these things up gradually. Events in the story -- which is very much the story of Jeffrey Sinclair -- will speed up in each subsequent season.

Someone he considers a friend will betray him. Another will prove to be the exact opposite of what Sinclair believes to be true. Some will live. Some will die. He will be put through a crucible of terrible force, that will change him, and alter his destiny in a profound and terrible way...if he goes one way, or the other, will determine not only his own fate, but that of millions of others. He will grow, and become stronger, better, wiser...or be destroyed by what fate is bringing his way. In sum, it is a story of hope against terrible adversity and overwhelming odds.

Each of our characters will be tempted in a different way to ally with a dark force determined to once and for all destroy the peace. Some will fall prey to the temptation, others will not, and pay the price for their resistance.

The homeworld of one of our major characters will be decimated. War will become inevitable. And when it comes, Babylon 5 will be forever changed.

That, in broad brush strokes, is a little of what I plan to do with the series. It is, as stated, a novel for television, with a definite beginning, middle and end. The point being this:

If you genuinely approve of what you see in Babylon 5, if what we promised is what we delivered, if having seen the prologue to the five year story that is Babylon 5 you now wish to see the rest of the story...if, in short, we haven't lied to you, and you like what you see...then I ask that you voice your opinions. Space Rangers has been canceled; the fate of other SF shows is in question because studios and networks just aren't sure that there's a market for another SF series.

How can you help? By the following:

1) Write or fax the program director of your local TV station, the one that aired Babylon 5, telling them that you want to see the series which follows Babylon 5, and why.

2) Send another letter, or a a copy of that letter to Dick Robertson, Sr. Vice President, Warner Bros. Domestic Television Distribution, 4000 Warner Boulevard, Burbank, California, 91522.

If, on the other hand, you think we blew it...then let the show go the way of the trilobite. I've railed more than once against the idea that "Bad SF is better than no SF," and won't back off of that now that it's my own child on the railroad ties, waiting to see if a Mountie will untie it before the incoming train does its grisly business.

It's your choice, and your voice. And if you don't think one voice matters, think of the long history of a certain other show that would have long ago been consigned to the vaults of television history had it not been for involved and interested viewers.

We made the show, and did the very best that we could. Now it's in your hands....

[End of Straczynski's message]

3. In answer to a question raised by some members: the artist responsible for the Post Office's "Space Fantasy" stamps is Stephen Hickman, who is known for his cover art for Ace, Baen, and other publishers (according to S_c_i_e_n_c_e_F_i_c_t_i_o_n_C_h_r_o_n_i_c_l_e). If you plan on nominating the strip of stamps for the "Best Original Artwork" Hugo, remember that it is eligible for n_e_x_t year rather than this, since they first appeared in 1993. [-ecl]

4. Note that the factotum's e-mail address has changed.

Mark Leeper

MT 3D-441 908-957-5619
...mtgzfs3!leeper

I have always thought respectable people scoundrels,
and I look anxiously at my face every morning for
signs of my becoming a scoundrel.
-- Bertrand Russell

CHINA MOUNTAIN ZHANG by Maureen F. McHugh
Tor, ISBN 0-812-50892-0, 1993 (1992c), \$3.99.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
Copyright 1993 Evelyn C. Leeper

The premise of this novel may be unlikely--a 21st Century proletarian revolution in the United States, followed by a civil war which results in a u n d e f a c t o Chinese takeover--but then many good books are based on equally unlikely premises. The question is whether the follow-through is both well-developed and true to the premise, and in this McHugh gets full marks.

Undoubtedly the time McHugh spent living in China helped her to draw a believable Chinese, especially since it needn't be precisely the same as the present: time and events will effect changes in China, and outside of China her societies are blends of the Chinese influence with existing cultures. Even the main character, Zhang Zhong Shan, a.k.a. Raphael Luis, is a blend--half-Chinese, half-Hispanic. Though he "passes" as Chinese, he lives in fear that his Hispanic background will be discovered and his status lowered as a result. And he has other secrets, yet more dangerous.

Interleaved with Zhang's story are those of Angel, the kite flyer; Martine, the Martian colonist; and Qian San-xiang, the ugly daughter of Zhang's foreman. The inclusion of the Martian story

strikes me as trying to put too much in one novel; though I can see some of what McHugh is doing with it, it often seems to be just stuck in, as if the printer had accidentally stuck pages from another book in here. There is some interaction between Zhang and the colonists, but it seems unnecessary overall.

But the main story of Zhang's development keeps the reader interested. He doesn't undergo the epiphany so many protagonists do. His change is more gradual, and more realistic. (San-xiang's transformation is more sudden in some ways, yet here the suddenness both makes sense and serves to make a point about change.)

McHugh's short fiction shows her knowledge of China and this, her first novel, shows that she can project this into a future that has complexities which are to us at the same time both strange and familiar. I recommend this compelling story of a society and the people within it. (By the way, C h i n a M o u n t a i n Z h a n g won the James Tiptree, Jr. Award, given to works which expand and explore gender roles in science fiction and fantasy.)

MAC

A film review by Mark R. Leeper
Copyright 1993 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: John Turturro plays a character based on his own father in a film he directs and also co-wrote. Turturro proves that the lives of a family of carpenters is no less interesting than the lives of a family of criminals. Surprisingly entertaining.
Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4).

The vast majority of employed people in this country have

rarely, if ever, seen someone in the same occupation portrayed in the movies. There are maybe fifty or so professions that show up in films and fewer that have a major part in the plot of the film. Presumably from the filmmakers' viewpoint, other professions just are not dramatic. But, in fact, many people's stories are dramatic and they do take risks, have dreams, and in general have stories worth telling. John Turturro's father, Nicholas Turturro, built houses. In the family his adventures in that profession made interesting conversation, but could the story be transferred to film in a way that would make anyone want to come to see the film? John Turturro apparently thought so, and proves his point with M a c.

John Turturro plays Niccolo "Mac" Vitelli, a carpenter and brother to two carpenters and the son of a third. Mac's father is a genuine craftsman, but the three brothers work for a Polish builder who takes no pride in work and who looks for shortcuts to cheat the customer. Mac gets fed up and, together with his brothers Vito (played by Michael Badalucco) and Bruno (played by Carl Capotorto), forms a partnership to compete with his old boss. Mac has an eye for detail and assembles a team of quality builders, but financial problems follow and haunt him. Even worse, Mac's explosive temper more than once nearly ruins the family's dreams. The film also focuses on the private lives of the brothers. Mac finds a wife (played by Katherine Borowitz), but Vito and Bruno both like an attractive beatnik (played by Ellen Barkin).

While the screenplay by Turturro and Branden Cole is episodic, it is nevertheless surprisingly intriguing. In fact, for interest value M a c holds it own against films about men building their dreams like B u g s y or T u c k e r, even though the main character has nowhere near the notoriety that Bugsy Siegel or even Preston Tucker had. The film has a nice portrait of an Italian-American family in the 1940 and 1950s. Turturro plays his role with an intensity bordering on over-acting at times. Still, this is an intelligent treatment of a story unlikely to be made into a film. I give this one a low +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

LIKE WATER FOR CHOCOLATE
A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: A whimsical shaggy-dog tale of a love story. It is not much like anything you have seen before. Light fantasy mixes into a forty-year story of denied love, vengeance, and even a ghost or two. We rarely see Mexican films in the art market, but this one is worth seeing. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4).

Relatively often we see Canadian films in the United States. With the length of the border we share with our neighbor to the south, it is surprising that so few Mexican films ever get seen in this country. With the exception of some low-budget horror and science fiction films, few Mexican movies ever make it north of the border. Many that do come north are popular only to make fun of.

Films like T_h_e_W_r_e_s_t_l_i_n_g_W_o_m_e_n_V_s._t_h_e_A_z_t_e_c_M_u_m_m_y_o_r_S_h_r_i_e_k_o_f_t_h_e_M_u_t_i_l_a_t_e_d can hardly represent the best that Mexico has to offer. A reminder of that fact is L_i_k_e_W_a_t_e_r_f_o_r_C_h_o_c_o_l_a_t_e, a pleasant shaggy-dog romance story told in the genre of magical realism. In magical realism, bizarre fantasy mixes with the everyday and is taken very matter-of-factly.

The story takes place in northern Mexico and southern Texas and centers on Tita (played by Lumi Cavazos), her mother (played by Regina Torne John), and her two older sisters. Tita grew up in the kitchen as a master cook. The time comes when Tita falls in love with Pedro. But Tita's mother forbids Tita to marry then or ever. Family tradition is that the youngest daughter cares for the mother until the mother's death. This arrangement precludes any personal life for the daughter and reduces the daughter to involuntary servitude. At the insistence of the willful mother, Pedro cannot have Tita, so he settles for Tita's older sister Rosaura. But the marriage is at first only a ruse. Pedro is really using the marriage as an excuse to remain close to Tita. Tita is forced to prepare the wedding feast for Pedro and Rosaura. But the supernatural shows its hand in Tita's cooking. Tita expresses herself in her exquisite cooking only too well. Eat what Tita has prepared and you will feel what Tita was feeling when she made the dish. The misery she feels while making the wedding feast is inexplicably spread to all the guests. But its when Tita cooks a r_e_a_l_l_y happy meal that things start to happen. Told against the background of a Mexico in revolution in the first third of this century, this is a story of anger and vengeance, yet it never loses its whimsical feel.

At 144 minutes, L_i_k_e_W_a_t_e_r_f_o_r_C_h_o_c_o_l_a_t_e may be a bit long to sustain interest through its entire length. Still, the style is

refreshingly different from anything the American film industry is turning out. It is directed by sometime-actor Alfonso Arau with a screenplay by Laura Esquivel based on her own novel, which combines magical realism and recipes for the dishes around which her story is built. The title, incidentally, refers to an anger as hot as the boiling water used for hot chocolate. I can recommend this one and give it a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

