



300 CE. It was a synthesis of various pagan, Jewish, and Christian forms. The name is derived from the fact that it "promised salvation through a secret knowledge or understanding of reality possessed by its devotees" (according to G\_r\_o\_l\_i\_e\_r'\_s\_A\_c\_a\_d\_e\_m\_i\_c\_E\_n\_c\_y\_c\_l\_o\_p\_e\_d\_i\_a). Until recently it was known mostly from the

THE MT VOID

Page 2

writings of its opponents, but the 1945 discovery of the documents at Nag Hammadi shed much new light on its beliefs. One such belief was in dualism: good and evil, light and darkness, truth and falsehood, spirit and matter. This belief was later found among the Manichaeans and the Bogomils. (More details will be available at the meeting.)

(And for those interested in such things, V\_a\_l\_i\_s has an appendix.)

However, if you can't find V\_a\_l\_i\_s, we will also be discussing his other work. To whet your appetite, here's an excerpt from a 1976 interview with Dick:

Interviewer: "Do you foresee yourself ever using the I\_C\_h\_i\_n\_g as heavily in writing a book as you did in T\_h\_e\_M\_a\_n\_i\_n\_t\_h\_e\_H\_i\_g\_h\_C\_a\_s\_t\_l\_e?"

Dick: "No, never again, because the I\_C\_h\_i\_n\_g failed me at the end of that book, and didn't help me resolve the ending. That's why the ending is so unresolved. The I\_C\_h\_i\_n\_g, uh ... I did through the coins for the characters, and I did give what the coins got--the hexagrams--and I was faithful to what the I\_C\_h\_i\_n\_g actually showed, but when it came time to wind up the book, the I\_C\_h\_i\_n\_g copped out completely, left me stranded. And since I had no notes, no plot, no structure in mind, I was in a terrible spot, and I began to notice ... that was the first time I noticed something about the I\_C\_h\_i\_n\_g I have noticed since. And that is that the I\_C\_h\_i\_n\_g will lead you along the garden path, giving you information that either you want to hear, or you expect to hear, or seems reasonable, or seems profound, up to a certain point. And then just about the time it's gotten your, you know, your credulity is there--you're willing to trust it--just about the time you've given it your faith and trust, it will zap you with the most malevolent, wrong information. In other words, it sets you up. It really does, it really sets you

up. I regard the I\_C\_h\_i\_n\_g as a malicious spirit. As actually spirit, an animation. I think it is an evil book, and I no longer use it. And I don't recommend that people ... I\_c\_e\_r\_t\_a\_i\_n\_l\_y do not recommend that people make important decisions on the basis of it. The more important a decision, the more it tends to hand you an answer which brings tragedy into your life. And I say that as ... after having used it for years and using it quite extensively. It is a liar. It speaks with forked tongue."

Now that you know what sort of mind we are talking about, if you want to discuss one of his books, there's \_V\_a\_l\_i\_s. See the world the way a paranoiac sees it!

2. Like many Americans I have been concerned of late about American creativity. Are we losing our edge? We have a generation of whom a substantial percentage are unable to answer the question "name three countries in North America"--that's true, by the way, something like 10% answer that question incorrectly. Is it possible that this generation is losing its competitive edge? Well, I have done a study and I can tell you that at least in one area we lead the world. America is the country that is pushing fearlessly into new frontiers of potato chip technology. Meanwhile, across the Pacific, the Japanese are taking a not-invented-here attitude and are funneling all of their capital that could be winning the potato chip race and instead they are squandering it on the rice cracker--at least for now.

I don't know about you but I love these new kettle-cooked potato chips, probably the greatest single advance in potato chip technology of the post-Vietnam period. Have you tried any of those babies? One brand of them comes in a bag with a lighthouse on it. I think the legend is that these things were fried extra hard to stay crispy in the wet sea spray of Cape Cod. You want a crisp potato chip? These things are it. You can stir your coffee with them and they don't wilt. You now have a potato chip that you can

enjoy in the shower if you really want to take potato chips in with you while you wash your hair. These things were quality tested in Hurricane Andrew. They opened bags of them during the worst furries of the storm they stayed crisp and hard. Rescue workers found them--unbroken--embedded two inches into trees.

And let us not forget that it was America that developed the Pringle, the potato chip that comes pre-chewed and then stuck back together. Those are the ones that come not in a bag but a cylinder. Let's face it, a bag was always a concession to the fact that even the manufacturer did not know what size and shape their potato chips would come out. They always passed the buck back to the potato instead of taking responsibility for the shape and size of the product the way the Pringles people do. With Pringles every chip is exactly like every other. There is a sense of security there. They are the McDonald's of potato chips. You know what you are getting with a Pringles potato chip. It may be a lousy excuse for a potato chip and it may taste like a wafer of library paste, but at least you know that in advance. And they dependably are the same little saddle shape. Well, they could be made in any shape, you form them from little particles like Styrofoam, but the public seems to like a saddle shape for chips. Flat disks would remind them too much of Church. Americans may not know three countries in North America, but they do know what shape a potato chip should be. And isn't that what inquiring minds really need to know?

---

3. BRITTLE INNINGS by Michael Bishop (Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-08136-5, April 1994, 502pp, US\$21.95) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

I am not a baseball fan (or indeed, a fan of any sport), so when I first heard that Michael Bishop was writing a novel about minor league baseball in the South during World War II, my ears didn't immediately perk up. But I kept hearing recommendations and praise for it, so when it arrived, I decided to give it a try. Sometimes I make the right decisions.

B\_r\_i\_t\_t\_l\_e\_I\_n\_n\_i\_n\_g\_s is good--very good. Though baseball is the background, B\_r\_i\_t\_t\_l\_e\_I\_n\_n\_i\_n\_g\_s is not about baseball; it is about what makes us human, what makes us the same--and what makes us different. To do this, Bishop uses not only the metaphor of baseball, but all the parallels of his theme in the racial segregation of the era. The various characters each have his or her place in society, and this place is often independent of any rational basis. That may sound trite, but in Bishop's hands, it is not, and he skillfully uses the hidden true nature of background of his characters to show how we often make decisions based on incomplete or incorrect assessments of people.

The story takes place in 1943, when Danny Boles, fresh out of high school in Oklahoma, is signed for the Highbridge (Georgia) Hellbenders, a class C farm club. When he arrives, however, he has been struck mute by an incident on his journey and is forced to begin his stay as more of an observer and less of a participant than might normally be the case. His interaction with his teammates, especially Jumbo Hank Clerval, form a window into the world of human relationships. There is more I could say about B\_r\_i\_t\_t\_l\_e\_I\_n\_n\_i\_n\_g\_s, but I don't want to reveal too much of the plot.

Bishop also conveys a wonderful sense of time and place--you feel as if you are in the hot and dusty 1940s South as you read B\_r\_i\_t\_t\_l\_e\_I\_n\_n\_i\_n\_g\_s. And in addition to the main part of the novel (written as Danny's first-person narrative), there are also sections written from another voice, in a totally different style, which describe a totally different time and place. These, too, are excellent, and the combination of the two provides yet another level of meaning. I heartily recommend this book, not only for now, but also as a strong contender when Hugo time comes around.

---

4. BRIAN FROUD'S FAERIELANDS: THE WILD WOOD by Charles de Lint (Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-09630-3, 1994, 221pp, US\$19.95) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Every year Readercon gives out its Small Press Awards, and one is for the best craftsmanship in publishing. Bantam is not a small press, of course, but I thought of that award when I got this book, because it has the feel of a fine book. I just wish the story had been up to it.

But first, the physical package. While electronic publishing is making inroads, there is still something special about the feel of a book. This one is a smaller than usual size (5.5 by 8.0 inches), which sets it apart from the run-of-the-mill--a clever psychological ploy there and I admit part of why I decided to read this. (The other reasons were that I like most of what Bantam publishes, and I enjoyed de Lint's J\_a\_c\_k\_t\_h\_e\_G\_i\_a\_n\_t-K\_i\_l\_l\_e\_r.) The pages are a soothing cream-colored rather than a harsh white or off-white. The text uses an unusual typeface and the whole is topped off with color illustrations by Brian Froud.

However, this is presumably being sold as a novel, and as a novel it is disappointing. It's true I am not a big fantasy fan, but T\_h\_e\_W\_i\_l\_d\_W\_o\_o\_d seems like a padded-out novella with a somewhat obvious and cliched message. Long descriptions of Canadian and New Mexican scenery are well-written but fail to add to the mood as seems to have been intended. de Lint writes well but this is not his best work. There are three more books planned in the "Faerielands" series (by Patricia McKillip, Midori Snyder, and Terri Windling); whether they are sequels or independent stories remains to be seen. But T\_h\_e\_W\_i\_l\_d\_W\_o\_o\_d is not a very promising start and I can't recommend it.

---

## 5. THE HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: This is a film with large virtues and large problems. Many fine actors are present, but more for name value than because they had something special to contribute. But we do get a feel for the sweep of Chile's history this century.

D\_r.\_Z\_h\_i\_v\_a\_g\_o it isn't, but it is Zhivagesque. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4). Unfortunately, much of what I would like to say about the film would telegraph unexpected plot twists, so a spoiler section will follow the review.

Bille August is best known in this country for his films P\_e\_l\_l\_e\_t\_h\_e\_C\_o\_n\_q\_u\_e\_r\_o\_r and T\_h\_e\_B\_e\_s\_t\_I\_n\_t\_e\_n\_t\_i\_o\_n\_s. This time around he has adapted and directed T\_h\_e\_H\_o\_u\_s\_e\_o\_f\_t\_h\_e\_S\_p\_i\_r\_i\_t\_s, based on Isabel Allende's novel. The film features a powerhouse cast of at least nine international stars, chosen in what often seems to be bizarre casting decisions. The film is an uneasy blend of Magical Realism

and hard-edged politics. The story is set in Chile and is about two generations of women in the Trueba family whose lives are troubled in large part by Esteban Trueba (Jeremy Irons) who rules the family. Clara is a young girl with psychic talents which bring her family tragedy. Clara remains mute for twenty years, but is once again willing to talk when courted by the dashing Esteban (who earlier was engaged to her sister). Esteban made his fortune prospecting for gold. Now he wishes to settle down on a big ranch and to run the world around him with a little philandering on the side. The Indians who have worked the land can stay but are treated like serfs. This is the story of Esteban, his wife Clara (Meryl Streep), his sister Ferula (Glenn Close), and his daughter Blanca (Winona Ryder). We follow two generations, their lives and loves and their politics.

Just a look at that cast tells you that a lot of the budget of this film is going into getting major stars. While there are more than enough Hispanic actors who are finding it hard to get work, big names are being cast as Hispanics. As far as I am concerned that is only a minor pity if the people cast are really good in their roles. The sad fact is that the high-priced talent is less and not more effective than more realistic people would have been. Many of the big stars might have been believable if this was the first time we were seeing them but Winona Ryder looks like someone who would be more at home in California than in Chile. Streep and Irons, both very good actors, but they sound like they are respectively from the U.S. and Britain. Glenn Close somehow manages to be as believable in her role as a native Chilean, but even the often under-rated Close does no better than a native would have. This is a German-Danish-Portuguese-U.S. co-production, but that does not mean they could not have gotten an Hispanic cast. L\_i\_k\_e\_W\_a\_t\_e\_r\_f\_o\_r\_C\_h\_o\_c\_o\_l\_a\_t\_e is a Mexican film cast with inexpensive Mexican unknowns and every casting choice in that film is as good or better than the choices in this film.

The film does inherit the sweep of the novel and that helps it overcome some of its problems to get a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

SPOILER: Some more comments I wanted to make as mild spoilers. The device of having Blanca narrate the film makes it seem more personal, but at the same time it destroys some of the suspense.

Much of the last part of the plot seems contrived. Every good deed that Esteban has committed rewards him in the end and each bad deed ends up costing him more than he expects. However, Ryder says that the diaries helped her understand how events were interconnected so it leaves open the possibility that she is stressing the interconnections.

Bille August has written and directed an adaptation of Isabel Allende's novel, making a film that has strong parallels to Bernardo Bertolucci historical epics 1 9 0 0 and T h e L a s t E m p e r o r.

The similarities are so great, in fact, that one could almost consider the three films to be a trilogy. Each film starts in the old world and a vanished culture where the main character is a man who has lord-like power and uses it to defend the old order of things. There are signs of change around him but he confuses them with corruption of the old order. Finally the wheel turns and it is the new more liberal forces in power. The character is forced to realize that what he saw as corruption was really the force of reform.

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

leeper@mtgzfs3.att.com

To succeed in the world it is not enough to be stupid,  
you must also be well-mannered.

-- Voltaire

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT ALMOST BLANK