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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
 Club Notice - 11/18/94 -- Vol. 13, No. 21

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are in Middletown 1R-400C
 Wednesdays at noon.

_D_A_T_E _T_O_P_I_C

- 11/19 STAR TREK: GENERATIONS (Saturday, 1:20 PM, Hazlet Multiplex)
- 12/07/94 Discussion: This Season's SF Movies
- 01/04/95 Book: Bruce Sterling's CRYSTAL EXPRESS and GLOBALHEAD
- 01/25/95 Book: Donald E. McQuinn's WARRIOR
- 02/15/95 Book: Franz Kafka's METAMORPHOSIS
- 03/08/95 Book: Stanislaw Lem's FUTUROLOGICAL CONGRESS

Outside events:
 The Science Fiction Association of Bergen County meets on the second Saturday of every month in Upper Saddle River; call 201-933-2724 for details. The New Jersey Science Fiction Society meets on the third Saturday of every month in Belleville; call 201-432-5965 for details.

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1. For the final SF film excursion, we will be attending STAR TREK: GENERATIONS at the Hazlet Multiplex. By (semi-)popular demand, will be attending the first matinee *AFTER NOON*, which is the 1:20 PM showing. (There were complaints about the early time for last week's get-together.)

Again:

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2.I have never really been into boating, but I think this would be a good time to start, thanks to a court decision in Manchester, England. I may need to know boating, really soon. In fact I think we all are going to have to be prepared for nasty wet situations. In a word, I am really afraid we are going to get a serious flood. That thing they got in Texas, that was nothing compared with what is to come. And it all is because of this court decision.

It seems there was a couple, Graham and Amanda Glassgow, who were fired from the Salvation Army in England. And what did they do? They turned around and sued the Salvation Army. They claimed they had answered the call of God when they came to work for the religious organization. But last May, God changed his call. They were dismissed--they lost their salaries and their army-provided home. And the Glassgows decided that the change in the call was an overly capricious act of God. Well, you know and I know that God really can be vicious and very unpredictable. Most insurance policies say they do not pay off for "acts of God." So the court looked at the case and ruled that contracts with God are not legally binding.

Now I am not sure how you really can have a contract with God

unless you get Him to sign on the dotted line. But perhaps verbal contracts could occasionally be considered contracts with God. But now the court says they are not. They had no employment rights as they were "answering a call from God" when they joined. The couple lost their Army-supplied home as well as their income.

Now the last contract I know about with God was the Covenant after the Great Flood. I am not saying that there were not a lot of offers since. Most were like "Give me a passing grade, and I promise to come to church for a whole year." But now if God is not bound to keep His word, well, there goes the Covenant. It may start to rain any time. [-mrl]

3. INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: Anne Rice adapts her own sensual vampire novel to the screen in a lush and languorous adaptation. The film features an amazing acting job by Kirsten Dunst and one nearly as good by Tom Cruise. The pacing is slow with a touch of Tennessee Williams tone, the photography is beautiful. Overall a fine adaptation of the novel.
Rating: +2 (-4 to +4)

It seems a natural to write a vampire story from the point of view of the vampire and to really explore what it must be like to be a vampire. It must have been done in pulp fiction, though I am not specifically aware of any such story. Fred Saberhagen tried it in 1975 with T_h_e_D_r_a_c_u_l_a_T_a_p_e. But the idea became a sensation with 1976's I_n_t_e_r_v_i_e_w_w_i_t_h_t_h_e_V_a_m_p_i_r_e by Anne Rice. This smoky, sensual novel of the relationship between the new vampire Louis and the sublimely amoral Vampire Lestat struck a responsive chord with readers. Since then Rice has become second only to Bram Stoker for popularity of her vampire fiction.

Neil Jordan has directed the new film version of I_n_t_e_r_v_i_e_w_w_i_t_h_t_h_e_V_a_m_p_i_r_e. At first look, it seems a long stretch from his popular M_o_n_a_L_i_s_a and T_h_e_C_r_y_i_n_g_G_a_m_e. In fact, viewers who like this film should also see his earlier C_o_m_p_a_n_y_o_f_W_o_l_v_e_s and vice versa. Each is a unique, dreamlike, and Freudian exploration of the supernatural. That film was a very creative retelling of Little Red Riding Hood as a sort of sexual werewolf story. The two films should almost be seen as a pair.

The story begins in 1791 as Louis (played by Brad Pitt) is a plantation owner who has lost his family and thinks he has nothing left to live for. What he gets is not death but instead is undeath, the gift--if "gift" is the right word--of the Vampire Lestat (Tom Cruise). The two take up living together--if "living" is the right word--on Louis's plantation as Lestat helps Louis through the hardest transition of his life--if "life" ... well, you get the idea. Much of the story is just how Louis adapts to his new state. Eventually Louis is fed up Lestat's indiscriminate killing of humans. He would leave, but Lestat binds him by making the eleven-year-old Claudia a vampire and the third member of the family. Now Claudia will forever have the body of a child--well, a child with an impervious body and sharp teeth--while her mind matures to that of an adult.

The pacing Anne Rice's story, fairly faithfully rendered since Rice herself scripted, is paradoxically both slow and fast. Years seem to go by very quickly to immortals who never change. But the story has an almost Tennessee Williams feel of characters working out deep emotional problems. (Williams, incidentally, started out

in the horror genre himself. Some of his plays, like S_u_d_d_e_n_l_y_L_a_s_t_S_u_m_m_e_r, still show the hand of the horror writer. This film may well represent the sort of thing he might have written had he continued.) The story give us a sensory portrait of how the world is different for the Undead. Much of the film is just concerned introspectively with the condition of being a vampire and with the inter-relationships of the vampires. Lestat accepts his condition and happily goes about the business of killing. Louis is more moral and detests his parasitic inclinations. Claudia is torn between the ways of the two. This is not to say that the entire

film is cerebral. There certainly is some action and the plot does advance. But Jordan intentionally makes plot second to style. His story is told with dramatic visual style which takes full advantage of moody settings in New Orleans and Paris. The photography is by Philippe Rousselot, who is known for atmospheric pieces like D_i_v_a, H_e_n_r_y & J_u_n_e, and S_o_m_m_e_r_s_b_y.

As far as to acting, I would say honors to all, but the most amazing acting award goes to Kirsten Dunst as Claudia. Anna Paquin won an Oscar for far less interesting acting in T_h_e_P_i_a_n_o. I do not know the age of Dunst, but she has to play all the emotions of an adult woman in the body of an eleven-year-old. It sounds like an impossible casting job. Amazingly, Dunst has an adult's acting talent while she still looks the part of a child. I would not be surprised if we end up hearing a lot of her in the years to come. Of course there was the whole brouhaha over Tom Cruise in the role of Lestat. Rice was at first very vocal against the casting choice, then later claims to have said that she liked Cruise in the role. I went through the same set of emotions. This is a major departure for Cruise and he plays Lestat with just the right air of flippancy. It is hard to understand how anyone saw it initially, but Cruise is just about perfect for Lestat. Brad Pitt as Louis is fine, as the sometimes bewildered and sometimes vengeful, but always well-intentioned vampire who at least nominally the main character. In smaller roles we have Christian Slater, Stephen Rea (who was also in Jordan's C_r_y_i_n_g_G_a_m_e) and Antonio Banderas. Whatever faults the film has, it is not in the acting.

Neil Jordan seems to make one good film after another on the theme of the sub-culture of people who live outside normal society. As his films go, this is not one of his best efforts. But as far as an exploration of the world of the undead, Anne Rice has nothing to complain about. This film get a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

4. PARIS AU XXE SIECLE (PARIS IN THE 20TH CENTURY) (a book review by Pierre Jelenc [rcpj@panix.com]):

[This is a "guest" review from the Internet, reprinted here with Pierre Jelenc's permission.]

Unless you have a strong emotional attachment to Verne, don't bother. It sucks.

It is in sorrow, as well as in anger, that I make that statement. Essentially, the book as it stands was close to a first draft that Verne sent to his editor as a followup to CINQ SEMAINES EN BALLON. In it, he proceeds to brown-nose every notable writer of the time, especially those published by his editor. The writing is very uneven (of course, that is an unedited text, it presumably could have been improved).

The story: A poor orphaned would-be poet gets in trouble in the highly anti-artistic Paris of 1960. He cannot hold a job, falls in love with the fifteen-year old daughter of a former teacher, makes a mess of it, makes a mess of himself.

While there are interesting predictions scattered through the book, they are presented in a very didactic manner--stop the story; describe the elevated railway system; restart the story--as though Verne had a list of ideas, and just scattered them through the manuscript without much regard for style and continuity. Then there are massive misses. Essentially, he missed **completely** everything on the socio-political side, and in many cases was no more than ploddingly 19th-century on the technological and scientific one. Just off the top of my head, in 1960:

- No world wars nor decolonization.
- No Common Market.
- No space effort.
- Public transportation by El rather than subway, driven by compressed air.
- Few internal combustion engines, but lots of compressed CO2.
- No incomprehensible French philosophers. No existentialism, no deconstruction (a blessing, I suppose).
- No Jazz; no Rock.
- No radio, TV, movies.
- Paris turned into a seaport.
- Major transatlantic ships sport paddlewheels (as well as propellers).

That said, it **is** interesting as a document, as one of the very first SF stories, but definitely not as literature. There was good reason why Verne never attempted to resubmit it later, when his fame would have almost assuredly guaranteed publication. [-pj]

5. AZTEC CENTURY by Christopher Evans (Victor Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05712-2, 1993, 352pp, L4.99 (C\$7.99)) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

You can tell this is a British book--it is a much darker vision than a United States book would be, even an alternate history in which the Aztecs rule the world.

The premise is that the Spanish did not defeat the Aztecs at Tenochtitlan, in part because Cortez joined them and helped them drive off the European armies. And instead of smallpox killing off 90% of the American population, the New Indies pox was carried back to Europe where it killed as many as the Black Death had two centuries earlier.

It is now the present in this world, and the Aztecs are making their final push on the British Isles. They control most of the Americas, and are trying to conquer the parts of Europe that still remain outside their control. At the start of the book, the British Royal family is in hiding in Wales, but they are quickly captured and brought to London to help give respectability to the puppet government that the Aztecs have set up.

To some extent this follows in a long line of "Britain under the heel" books, which stretch back at least as far as Saki's When Will iam Came. That was set in the future, but there have been other alternate histories, including many of Britain ruled by victorious Nazis. I think America's distance from other world powers has made authors less likely to use America as the conquered country, so there is a certain irony to the fact that the conqueror here is from that very distant land, America. In any case, Evans carries on the line with a well thought-out portrait of what an Aztec-conquered Britain would be like.

Evans does many predictable things, including some fairly unsubtle parallels to the Irish situation, but he also has some original ideas as well. The characters are well-drawn and more ambiguous than one often finds in works such as this which rely more on setting than character.

On the other hand, Evans has used a couple of the cliches of alternate histories. One might question whether the history of Russia, for example, would have been as similar in Evans's world as ours, or whether a Karl Marx, albeit a somewhat different one, would even have existed. And having a fast food place called MexTaco with golden arches is a bit unlikely. (Maybe it's just a manifestation of a belief that fast food will come from America, no matter what.) But these are relatively small quibbles. My one suggestion to the American publisher (I assume there will be one) is that they might want to include a pronunciation guide for the Nahuatl words and names. This is an alternate history that I can

THE MT VOID

Page 7

enthusiastically recommend. [-ecl]

6. ALTERNATE OUTLAWS edited by Mike Resnick (Tor, ISBN 0-812-53344-5, 1994, 402pp, \$4.99) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

I like alternate history stories. I like the game of saying, "Well, what might have happened if John Wilkes Booth's gun has misfired, or if the Nazis had developed an atomic bomb, or even if Fidel Castro had pursued a career in baseball?" But just saying, "Hey, let's take a bunch of famous people and make them all outlaws, regardless of likelihood, or even of time or place" is not something that does a whole lot for me. And this is probably why I enjoyed Resnick's A_A_l_t_e_r_n_a_t_e_P_r_e_s_i_d_e_n_t_s and A_l_t_e_r_n_a_t_e_K_e_n_n_e_d_y_s more than his A_l_t_e_r_n_a_t_e_W_a_r_r_i_o_r_s or A_l_t_e_r_n_a_t_e_O_u_t_l_a_w_s. In the first two, usually the stories were about what made the people famous; in the last two, frequently all that remains of the celebrity is the name.

Certainly this is the case in the first story in this anthology, "Ma Teresa and the Hole-in-the-Wall Gang" by Jack C. Haldeman II. While clearly intended as a humorous story (witness some of the puns contained therein), this tale of Mother Teresa, Albert Einstein, and Albert Schweitzer as bandits in the Wild West just

throws famous people from different eras together in yet another era with no explanation given. At least Robert Sheckley's "Miranda" and Brian M. Thomsen's "Bigger Than U.S. Steel" each stay within a single era and region, but still don't do much for me.

That is not to say there aren't good alternate history stories here in the "classic" tradition. "A Spark in the Darkness" by Beth Meacham is a genuine alternate history, and a very well-written one too, about another path that Helen Keller's life might have taken.

The "gimmick" in David Gerrold's "What Goes Around" is not exactly new, and the irony is that the story didn't have to be an alternate history and the alternate history aspect may actually detract from it. Even so, it is one of the strongest stories in the book. Also strong is Barbara Delaplace's "Building Bridges," about the power of art, and especially meaningful if you know about the "Exhibit of Degenerative Art" in the 1930s.

Kristine Kathryn Rusch's "Common Sense" also has at least some basis in historical reality. "The Crimson Rose" by Tappan King may be the most elaborate alternate history in the book, but I find it unlikely. (Of course, the same is true of many of the other stories, but this is written on a more serious level than most.)

"The Ballad of Ritchie Valenzuela" by Maureen McHugh is well-written, but its "punchline" is hardly original in alternate stories. Allen Steele's "Riders in the Sky" is an average Western outlaw story. Jack Nimersheim's "72, With a Bullet" is an unremarkable alternate Kennedy story. (Even in this non-Kennedy, non-President volume, there are multiple Kennedy stories.) Janni Lee Simmer's "Learning Magic" looks at the somewhat obvious possibilities of a master lock-picker taking the criminal road. George Alec Effinger's "Shootout at Gower Gulch" is another competent Wild West outlaw story.

"Literary Lives" by Kathe Koja and Barry N. Malzberg is, perhaps, too literary for its neighbors here. I can't help but feel that most readers will be more mystified than enlightened by this story

of famous literary figures. Judith Tarr's "Cowards Die: A Tragicomedy in Several Fits," Nicholas A. DiChario's "Giving Head," and David Gerrold's "Satan Claus" were other stories whose style didn't appeal to me for one reason or another, and which I only skimmed. (Naturally, your mileage may vary.)

Speaking of style, Laura Resnick's "Saint Frankie" is very similar to her "The Vatican Outfit" in the earlier A _ l _ t _ e _ r _ n _ a _ t _ e _ W _ a _ r _ r _ i _ o _ r _ s .

And

Martha Soukup must have a thing about dogs: first there was "A Dog's Life" and now there is "Good Girl, Bad Dog." I'm sure that I've read a story very similar in premise to Dean Wesley Smith's "Black Betsy" recently (with a jukebox as time machine); I assume it was another by him and there may eventually be a whole series.

Walter John Williams's "Red Elvis" is a bit of a cheat, and I'm usually not thrilled with alternate Elvis stories anyway. (My answer to Resnick's question in the introduction to this--"What would an alternate anthology be without an alternate Elvis Presley story?"--is, "In general, probably better.")

"A Quiet Evening by Gaslight" fails to be alternate history on the grounds that it does not deal with historical personages. Gregory Feeley's "My Tongue in Thy Tale" probably requires a greater familiarity with Shakespeare than I have to get all the references, but I think I can safely say that it is not an alternate history either, but a secret history.

"Comrade Bill" by John E. Johnston III is also a secret history, and has only one minor cute gimmick. Katharine Kerr's "Cui Bono?" is another secret history, but a bit more serious, as is Michelle Sagara's "What She Won't Remember." But Alan Rodgers and James D. MacDonald's "Souvenirs" is by far the most downbeat secret history of the lot.

It is possible that the lode of alternate history stories has been tapped out. (Is that mixing a metaphor?) Or perhaps more accurately, the field needs to lie fallow for a couple of years,

because the soil is exhausted. There are good stories here,

notably the Meacham, the Gerrold, and the Delaplace. But the general level of these anthologies seems to be going downhill and perhaps a rest is needed. [-ecl]

8. WANDERER by Donald E. McQuinn (Del Rey Books, 1994, \$6.99) (a book review by Dale L. Skran):

In Wanderer McQuinn continues his epic post-nuclear war adventure series set in the Pacific Northwest 500 years after it all fell apart in a rather nasty war. Humanity has survived, and the former Seattle area resembles medieval Europe, with castles and "Dog Warriors" living on the plains hunting with enormous hounds. In the first volume, Warrior, a delicate balance of power between the Harbundai, the Olans(a corrupt feudal state), the Mountain People (cruel bands of scavengers), and the Dog People east of the mountains. is upset when an ancient creche is cracked open by an earthquake, springing a tiny band of survivors, kept alive from the early 21st Century in cold-sleep, onto an unsuspecting reborn world. They include Donnacee Tate, a black female marine major, Conway, an army transportation manager yearning for adventure, four feminist teachers, Jones, a nutty preacher, Falconner, the highest ranking military person, and Leclerc, an engineer. They join forces with Gan Moondark, the heir to the chiefdom of the Dog People, to overthrow the harsh totalitarian state of Ola, where women are executed by torture if found reading. The word "teach" is considered obscene, and books, if found, are ritually burnt by the "Church," an all-female combination of Christianity and Medicine that maintains its position by providing "War Healers" to all comers.

In Wanderer Tate and Conway set out with Rose Priestess Sylah to find the "Door," a mysterious secret that Tate and Conway suspect could be another creche, and that Sylah believes holds the secret to power that will restore women to an equal place with men, as well as restore the lost order of "Teachers," a branch of the Church purged when it would not reveal the secret of the "Door."

Meanwhile, Jones, who has broken off from the other creche survivors, establishes himself as "Moonpriest" first to the Mountain People, and later to a growing army of nomads known as "Windband." By a deft combination of luck, sheer fanaticism, and a few tidbits of remembered technology, Jones slowly builds a powerful and vicious army dedicated to revenge on his former friends.

Skipping over almost 700 pages of plots, sub-plots, and counter-plots, the story concludes with a slam-bang running battle as

Sylah, Tate, and Conway find the "Door" with Moonpriest and Windband hot on their heels. In the ensuing battle, the "Door," which turns out to be a laser-guarded, underground installation with a no-moving-parts temperature differential power system that the "Teachers" operated out of, complete with an enormous library of video discs, is completely destroyed. Fortunately, our little band escapes with a mere five books, their lives, and some extra ammunition. But one of the books is a list of creche locations, keeping alive the hope that they may one day contact other survivors.

This really brief condensation doesn't do justice to McQuinn's richly imagined future world. I'm a sucker for these "can they rebuild technology" type stories, but I think most fans are as well (remember R_a_d_i_o_P_l_a_n_e_t?). McQuinn has all the barbarian action, strange weapons, and combat tension of a good Jerry Pournelle novel without any of the dubious Pournelle philosophizing. Since McQuinn uses different characters to mouth conflicting philosophies, we are spared the didactic effect often seen in Pournelle or Dickson. A lot of the basic tension of the story comes from the facts that 1) the survivors feel they must teach Moondark and his people technology to survive, 2) they feel guilty doing since they know how it turned out the last time around, 3) some of them (Tate, Conway), either are professional soldiers or have always wanted to test themselves in combat, while others (Carter, Anspach) are committed to a kind of feminist conflict resolution that seems completely out of place in the kind of "torture the prisoners and blind the slaves" world they have emerged into.

Probably the weakest point in the story is Conway's sudden change of sides, and then his just as sudden return to the forces of Gan Moondark. He does have a motive, but it didn't ring quite true.

Recommended to fans of post-nuclear war fiction, military SF, historical combat, and to those interested in the role of women in society, or social organization in general. May also appeal to fans of historical fiction, alternative universes(although it isn't), and barbarian warfare. Not a Hugo candidate, but a big, exciting book that kept me turning the pages. Be warned that there are occasional scenes of medieval-type torture and violence. [-dls]

9. WITCH by Donald E. McQuinn (Del Rey Books, 1994, \$10.00, trade paperback) (a book review by Dale L. Skran):

Hopefully, you have just finished reviewed the recap of _ W _ a _ r _ r _ i _ o _ r in my review of _ W _ a _ n _ d _ e _ r _ e _ r, as well as the review of _ W _ a _ n _ d _ e _ r _ e _ r, and know exactly what the background is for _ W _ i _ t _ c _ h. Things are getting

THE MT VOID

Page 11

twitchy for the creche survivors. They've found the secret of the "Door," and it has led to schism in the Church. Rose Priestess Sylah has been condemned as a witch, and Gan Moondark, lord of the Three Kingdoms (Harbundai, Ola, and the Dog People) has given her his protection. Unfortunately, Jones a.k.a. "Moonpriest" has formed an alliance with the "Skan" (great name!), a Viking-like culture, and the main Church to suppress the Rose Priestess, obtain the secret of the Door, while looting, burning, and slave-taking.

The main thrust of the story concerns a young girl trained by the leader of the Skan, an old witch-woman, as a spy, and the disruptive effect she has on the creche survivors as they struggle to re-create a few more ancient weapons to give Gan Moondark the edge in the big blow-out with Moonpriest and the Skan. When it comes, the "final battle" seems a bit unlikely (giant capacitors??), and you wonder if Moonpriest and Fox Eleven would really have such a light guard on their poison gas catapult, but it's loads of slam-bang fun anyway.

One of the strengths (and weaknesses) of this series is that it is big enough to go on forever--after all, we have more creches to find and all of North America for Gan to conquer, not to mention the restoration (??) of equal rights for women, something that arguably has not yet arrived after centuries of struggle in the real world. Still, I like this stuff, and McQuinn keeps you turning the pages.

Another weakness is that _ W _ i _ t _ c _ h introduces a tribe with a vaguely telepathic healing ability, and added to the visions of the Church's "seers," we seem to be drifting in the supernatural powers

direction. However, the use of these capabilities in the stories is very limited, and have not yet corrupted the series.

Still recommended to those who like post-nuclear war stories. [-dls]

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When I think of the number of disagreeable people that I know who have gone to a better world, I am sure hell won't be so bad at all.

--Mark Twain

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