

But anyway people want to know what is going to become of the name MT VOID when it is no longer being published from MT. Well it's is a sort of silly and fatuous question. It is not like these changes have caught us unaware. We have actually had years to prepare for the possibility that the MT VOID would some day have to move out of

THE MT VOID

Page 2

MT and we would have to rename the MT VOID. We wanted a name that would be exclusively our own that would capture the essence of our fanzine. So we went to the self-same people who came up with the name "Lucent Technologies" and today I am going to announce the results. It did not come cheaply, but we have a name to capture the spontaneity and the originality that people have come to associate with the VOID. But now we are ready. And the name they have chosen for us, and I hope I am not jumping the gun by announcing it, is ... ANALOG.

Well, anyway, I am amazed at the response to my little piece about where to find the comet. It was not even an issue of the VOID, it was just a quick comet comment so you would not feel you missed it when I mentioned it. I got a lot of response. I think it was because unbeknownst to me it had become a major media event. People were fighting to pay in some cases as much as \$10 for Comet Hyakutake dolls for their kids that were no more than tufts of surgical cotton. And, of course there was that TV show about the men who spend their nights tracking the comet and the women who love them. And Jesse Jackson made his comment in that interview Monday night that he is boycotting anything to do with astronomy because so little attention is paid to dark matter.

The most common comment I got was, "You said there wasn't a tail. Wake up, dummy. When I looked it had a long flowing tail. It also had wings and a beak." Well, actually some people did see a tail, I didn't. Actually when the moon is just a small crescent, Evelyn claims that she can make out the whole circle of the moon. It is an optical illusion, your mind filling in the missing part or playing tricks based on the background. Your mind's eye makes those two lines which are really parallel look like they bow together in the middle because of the concentric circles behind them. It is like the trick of your mind's eye to make Newt Gingrich look like a statesman because he has the House majority

behind him. Some people claimed that they could actually see it move across the sky and flash. One person actually heard it whirring overhead. That's the problem with sky phenomena, It is real tough to point and click. [-mrl]

2. A FAMILY THING (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: An Arkansas man discovers that his real mother was black and goes to Chicago to find his black half-brother. This is a deliberately paced and well-textured look at one black family and life in a black neighborhood, but it touches on a much wider black experience. Three excellent performances

THE MT VOID

Page 3

keep the viewer's attention. Rating: low +2
(-4 to +4)

Earl Pilcher, Jr. (played by Robert Duvall), is an Arkansas good ol' boy, complete with a pick-up truck that works a lot better than his family does. When his mother dies she leaves him a letter explaining that she really is not his biological mother. His real mother was a black servant whom his father had raped and who died giving birth to him. The final wish of the only mother Earl has known is that he find and get to know his black half-brother, Ray, in the Chicago police department. Earl takes his blue pick-up truck to navigate the Interstate and find his brother. What he finds is that Ray (James Earl Jones) has buried just beneath the surface the hate he still feels for Earl Sr. and Earl Jr. Having discharged an unpleasant responsibility, Earl starts for home only to be mugged and have his precious pick-up stolen. Ray finds he must care for Earl while Earl recovers and tries to get back his pick-up. Earl stays with Ray and gets to know Aunt T, their mother's sister (played by Irma P. Hall).

Earl describes his football days by saying he was small but made up for it by being slow. Much the same could be said of the plot of A

FAMILY THING, but the texture of life in the black neighborhood of Chicago is more the point of the film than the pacing. The plot is just a bit contrived to give Earl a grand tour of the black experience in America. It does more than just show it to him; he also experiences the feel of being an outcast and a minority. All this happens while he is thinking over the implications of his being black, all the while still looking and thinking white. Charles Gross's jazz score matches in style the low-energy storytelling. It pushes the right buttons, but is not very creative. Special credit should be given to Fred Murphy's photography which is constantly engaging in both the Arkansas town and especially in the Chicago black neighborhood with its El track supports.

If I were to choose whom I thought was the best American actor, there is no doubt in my mind that Robert Duvall would be my first choice. Here he gives a quiet but rich performance. The scene in which he reads his white mother's letter to his father is a beautiful piece of acting. Reportedly his approach is to get someone with the same background as his character and record him reading the lines, then to mimic it. Whatever he does, he is clearly sweating the details and turning in a totally authentic performance. James Earl Jones has a much narrower acting range, but within that range he is a joy to watch. However, Duvall's and Jones's acting styles do not quite mesh since while Duvall slightly understates his acting, Jones overstates. And both are often upstaged by Irma P. Hall whose Aunt T seems to have more personality than the two main characters combined.

Acting and visual texture carry the film even if the pacing is slow. I rate it a low +2 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

3. Boskone 33 (a convention report by Evelyn C. Leeper with a section by Mark R. Leeper) (part 4 of 6):

Why the Web Is Changing the World (or, is it?)

Sunday, 11:00AM

A. J. Austin, Daniel P. Dern, Gary Farber, Jeff Hecht (m), Sarah Smith

written by Mark R. Leeper

[Generally when I scribe for Evelyn's panels, I leave it to her to forge my almost incomprehensible notes into readable paragraphs. I am still experimenting with my style for panels where Evelyn is not present. Part of the problem is my whole attention is in typing like crazy and less is in thinking about what is said. I apologize to the panelists and member of the audience if I leave something out. Comments here are much abbreviated but give the gist of each person's comment.]

PROFILES OF PANELISTS:

- Smith: author of A KNOWLEDGE OF WATER, working on SFWA electronic rights statement
- Hecht: science and technical writer
- Dern: author of INTERNET GUIDE FOR NEW USERS, web site at <http://www.dern.com>, and does kibbitzing about the Internet
- Farber: a fan, an editor, token newbie

Hecht: The fax machine caught the public eye very quickly. Within months publishers would ask me "do you have a fax number?" and then a year later the question became "what is your fax number?" The Internet came on scene very quickly like fax, the Net was there before the Web. It was Nowhere two years ago, not above horizon until last two years. Twenty years ago the British Post Office had experimented in into teletext, offering access to a central set of computers computer over phone lines and a TV terminal. The graphics were crude, phone lines at 300 baud. The info providers had little idea what doing. Knight- Ridder lost \$50M in the project, but what was created evolved into the Web. The subject of the panel is, will this continue on?

Dern: What is magical about the Web is that it is popularly used. Unlike Infotext, it has really caught the public eye.

Audience member: Infotext did not have the structure of Web.

Farber: One reason that the Web is so powerful is that it easily gives people the ability to link text together and to jump to other text.

Audience Member: Pages on the Web are easy to set up and use.

Smith: The structure of the Web is distributed.

Dern: The Web may not be a permanent fixture. Tomorrow something else could come along. Some of the power is that the person making information available can just say, "Here is the address; if you want the information go get it." The information can be obtained at a small, finite cost to the receiver rather than to the sender. That is heavy on phone bandwidth. If we moved away from the Web we would still have something that would over-use the phone lines. We will need to increase telephone bandwidth since phone lines are still a bottleneck.

Audience Member: The Web is not going to make that big a difference. At most worldwide there are only 50M people on the Web, that is only 1% of the total population.

Smith: Not true, already there is internationalization of culture such as we have never had. For my writing I am getting and sharing materials internationally. I am working with other writers internationally and we have met each other over the Net. International conferences and sales are much easier, this has huge implications for government and for culture.

Hecht: I gave example of how fast fax came in replacing mail. The Internet is replacing couriers like Federal Express. Five years ago to get material to a London publisher I would use FedEx. Now when I want to get images to them what will happen is London asks, "Are the images on the Web?", London downloads them and gets printable quality images in minutes. This is a simple way in which the Web has replaced FedEx. Rather than waiting to be sent news we receive it immediately on the Web.

Saul Jaffe (in the audience): The Web is changing world quietly. In the last three months I have counted 40 commercials that include Web information. It is subtle but it is changing the world of advertising.

Hecht: The technology evolves almost organically.

Patrick Nielsen Hayden: People are starting to recognize how advertising is affected by the Web. I maintain a Web site for Tor Books, one of the earliest publisher Web sites. For most of that time it has been regarded by Tor as a curiosity. In the last four weeks my phone is ringing off the hook with questions of why are you doing so little to publicize this book or that.

Audience Member: The Web is changing world of advertising and changing how we advertise. It is a great way to change out use of information, but that is not how it is being used. Sturgeon's law applies: 90% of what is going out on the Web is garbage. Most is old-fashioned advertising copy. What the Web is giving us just more advertising.

Smith: The Web will have a leveling effect in advertising. Once if you were a small company you had very little for advertising, and your ads would be little seen. But Web access is cheap, Jackie Lichtenberg can put ads for her books and they are seen by the right audience.

Farber: The Web is a great equalizer. If someone searches for science fiction information on the Web using a search engine he is as likely to find Lichtenberg as Doubleday.

Patrick Nielsen Hayden: It is a different form of advertising, and it is not longer necessary to have a big and powerful organization to advertise.

Bobbi Fox (from the audience): Even through advertising only on the Web one chili company has become a big player in the chili market. Nerds seem to like chili. People seem to like the low-key sort of advertising that is on the Web. You don't need screaming Web ad in your face.

Dern: Each user sees a perfectly structured organization of what he is looking for, and each person can put info up and make info easy to get to, Almost everybody can put their information in the Web. Who in the audience owns a newspaper, radio station, etc.?

Smith: We haven't even talked about flattening effect of search engines on access power.

Audience member: But much of what is on the Web is useless garbage.

Audience Member: 90% of what comes over a telephone is garbage, but that is not an indictment of using the telephone.

Dern: Even if much of what is out there is useless, few of us go to read the whole Library of Congress. We can find what we need.

Hecht: One problem is that the Web hurts attention span. The user generally keeps jumping from subject to subject. In the end it is less useful than browsing an encyclopedia.

Farber: You have better editors in CD-ROM encyclopedia. You do not suddenly find yourself off in Australia.

THE MT VOID

Page 7

Patrick Nielsen Hayden: And if you like browsing encyclopedias you can do that on-line. I have subscribed to the services that allows you to browse the text of the Encyclopedia Britannica,

Hecht: A current problem is that images want to choke the Net. If people want to send out a lot of pictures, we will need to change the telecommunications so there is more bandwidth.

Dern: More applications out there will be needing more bandwidth, especially realaudio, and other audio applications. They sound provides an additional way to get information. It will be increasingly important. I can get news from Europe, asynchronously, when I want to get it, not when it is broadcast as with shortwave.

Farber: And those of us with processors can download video. There will be an increasing need for bandwidth.

Patrick Nielsen Hayden: Nobody has gotten rich betting bandwidth will not expand.

Hecht: There is a real bottleneck, however, fiber to wire connections will always be slow.

Dern: The problem with the Web is that there are only 24 hours in a day. If you could find TimeDoubler I would buy two.

Peter Trei (from the audience): Still relatively few people are

affected by the Web. In this country fewer than 10% of the population have e-mail addresses.

Farber: China has only 60,000 sites. But that is sufficient to get information in and out.

Trei: But very few people use the Web. Do you think the President surfs the Web? There are a few people in the information industry and that is all. It is a lot to find things through Alta Vista. The world just will not change very fast due to influences of the Web.

Dern: Well, for a system three years old we are not doing badly.

Smith: What is important is not that a high percentage of the population are users. What is important is that the channels of communication are set up. Information can get in and out. When a country overthrows tyranny one of the first things they do is put in phone lines.

Farber: In China the government knows that the Internet is a threat. They are creating the Great Firewall of China. But it still is not clear that with the presence of the Internet if

THE MT VOID

Page 8

censorship can succeed.

Trei: We currently are finding ways to pierce the firewall, but we need people at other end and to care and to cooperate. You can restrict it for average user, but you cannot stop the communication if there are people at both ends who want it.

Smith: It is very difficult to thoroughly monitor.

Hecht: For short periods you can censor information. You can threaten to throw CompuServe in jail for short while but eventually they get some backbone. But political forces are going to try to shut down or censor whole portions of Web.

Audience Member: Random censorship will be a problem, but Net as a whole is changing the world. Governments are frightened and trying

to govern the Internet the way they control radio or television.

Bobbi Fox: The ACLU is warning people that they still may be prosecuted for sending the wrong information over the Internet. But the Internet regards censorship as a fault and routes around it. People outside the United States already have offered places to put up Web sites illegal in the United States.

Hayden: How concerned are you that the big service providers will institute their own censorship?

Hecht: There are enough small Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to provide competition.

Dern: It is a lot harder to run a big service than a small one. You can open a small ISP and make it self-supporting, I am not ready to trust my e-mail to a company so big I cannot get someone on the phone if there is a problem.

Hecht: I expect the small ISPs will sell out to larger ones for the money.

Audience Member: It may be we will get better service from the smaller ISPs. With AOL it takes six days to get mail across the country.

Smith: The Baby Bells have a nice equity business. Installed cable is a cash cow.

Trei: Once you have a TCP/IP connection you don't really care where your service provider is. Once I am on the Net I don't care where my service come from.

Farber: Indexing into research done is somewhat easier on the Internet. The problem of doing science today is that there are

more journals and less time read them. There are whole journals on the Net and one can search for specific topics of interest instead of reading the whole journal.

Hecht: People are publishing science on the Net and looking at it seriously. Whole libraries spring up on the Net. Some way will be determined of giving fractional cents in royalties based on usage.

Trei: There are people working on micropayment schemes.

Dern: The Web is transforming businesses. If you are the only person making goat cheese in Vermont the time was you had to subsist on local business. Advertising on the Web makes the business easier to find. The question of distance is less important.

Smith: There is a famous site in North Alaska that is bringing together Eskimo culture. The Inuit are widely dispersed. Publishing aspects on the Web brings together a very scattered group of people and the new ways are weirdly strengthening the native culture.

Farber: Every virtual community is being extended.

Hecht: Communities can be spread over the world. Time is becoming less important. I can deal with people in different time zones without being inconvenienced. The next time I read my e-mail, the messages are waiting for me.

Hecht: We need to realize with a new technology there is an initial boom and then a stall-out. Some technologies recover, some do not. CB radio is one that never recovered to anywhere near the height of its usage. This will happen with the Web. There is a lot of hype right now and a lot of people will become discouraged with time.

Smith: Much is going to stay and will be profitable. How will cities change when the population working in a business can be distributed all over the country?

Farber: How will world be different when we know what everybody's red-eyed pet looks like?

And with that thought the panel ended. [-mrl]

[to be continued] [-ecl]

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Satire is a sort of glass, wherein beholders do
generally discover everybody's face but their own.

--Jonathan Swift

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