

also has one in the "Dramatic Presentation" category, for "The City on the Edge of Forever." (Asimov and Heinlein have 4 each, and Clarke has 3.) [-ecl]

3. I have made a discovery of great scientific import. This could be useful in the field of psychological testing and is a test reveals a great deal about a person. The true test of a personality is not how a person fills out multiple choice tests. It isn't the content and style of their dreams. What I have discovered is that the real device for insight into the soul of a person is French toast. It is French toast that really gets into the metaphysics of the mind. Now I had not even guessed this until last Sunday. I am in the habit of taking Evelyn out for Sunday breakfast. We go to the local diner and each of us orders either eggs or French toast. Last Sunday, we had both ordered French toast. Not surprising because Evelyn and I have very similar personalities. Little did I know that I was about to discover the device to really tell Evelyn's personality from mine. For the first time I noticed that we had different approaches to eating French toast and the two approaches really said something about us. My way of eating French toast is to hold it down with my knife and to rip off pieces with my fork. This leaves a ragged edge to the piece of French toast. One might at first guess that what this says about me is that in some senses I am a primal sort of personality. One might assume that I am ripping off pieces of the French toast in a way inherited from the jungle animal in all of us. Indeed my approach could be thought of as akin to the way some great cat, perhaps a lion or a leopard, would take pieces off of its prey, perhaps a zebra or a wildebeest, and would devour them. And I have to admit that there is a certain primal nature there, but it is really secondary in the reasons I use this approach to eating French toast. The real reason to eat French toast in this way is one of aesthetics. I want to create a ragged edge on the pieces I am about to eat in order that the edges be absorbent and carry with them the syrup. In fact mine is a very reasoned and rational approach to eating French toast.

However, reasoned and rational is the way the casual observer would assume that Evelyn eats her French toast. She holds the toast with her fork and makes a horizontal cut, dividing the toast into two rectangular pieces, then uses four parallel vertical cuts to divide the toast into ten rectangular bars of approximately equal size. This approach, which at first seems reasoned and rational, is, of course, merely well-ordered. The phrase that may be coming to your mind "anal-retentive" but I would ask you not to use so unscientific a name. This approach allows her to get all her cutting out of the way at the very beginning. But it is not as well-ordered as it at first appeared. As I pointed out to Evelyn after this careful and mathematical dissection she blew it all by eating piece 2C before 2B. [-mrl]

4. STARBORNE by Robert Silverberg (Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-10264-8, 1996, 304pp, US\$22.95) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Robert Silverberg's latest novel takes a lot of familiar science fiction ideas and combines them in a story that keeps promising to go somewhere, but manages to make even the transformation of mankind unexciting.

The spaceship Wotan has been launched with its crew of fifty by an Earth so bored with Paradise that this is the only excitement they can think of. While it travels through hyperspace to discover a planet that can be colonized, the ship stays in touch with Earth through telepathic twins. The crew explores a couple of planets, with somewhat familiar perils, learns that the twins' link seems to be weakening, and moves on to a climax that rings remarkably flat.

While I was reading this I kept feeling that just a few pages more and it would catch fire, that it was on the verge of something. But it never quite delivered on that, and looking back over it, it seems to have been a book about petty squabbles and personality conflicts more than about exploring the universe. Given that

society as a whole is filled with boredom and ennui, I suppose it isn't too surprising that the characters often seem to display these characteristics. For example, there is supposed to be a new captain every year. But after the first year, no one else will take the job, so the same person continues in that position. (This sounds like a lot of organizations I've been in.) The problem is that reading about bored characters is, well, boring. Trying to keep track of who's sleeping with whom doesn't really provide much interest.

As in several of Silverberg's recent books (in particular THE FACE ON THE WATERS and THE KINGDOMS OF THE WALL), the framework is a quest-like journey in which the diversity of characters is really what is supposed to hold your interest. Like many books with such a journey, the arrival is a bit of a let-down, and the problem here is that the characters are not interesting along the way either.
[-ecl]

5. MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: Calling it MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE implies a certain quality of writing, and with a story by Stephen Zallian we might almost expect we would get it. However, the script lets us down. This is a film that is more like a Harry Palmer film crossed with TOPKAPI and a James

Bond finale slapped on. The style is definitely not that of MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE, with its slowly and mysteriously built sting operations. This is just a mediocre espionage/mystery story transparently forced into the MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE world. Rating: low +1 (-4 to +4)

For seven years, from September 1966 to September 1973, perhaps the best-written program on television was "Mission: Impossible." The

program leveraged off the popularity of the James Bond films, but in fact, the writing and style was more like 1973's Best Picture, THE STING. Virtually every episode was of the same format. The Impossible Mission Force would be given some task to perform. The instructions would come on perhaps the most famous television prop of those years, the self-destructing tape found in some mysterious location. The team leader would thoughtfully dig through a stack of dossiers of possible candidates for the mission though, with the exception of the occasional guest star, the team he chose would almost always be identical to the team he chose the previous week. And then the team would go into action. Most of the program would then be the IMF doing a sequence of mysterious activities, obviously with purposeful intent. Each episode was a puzzle and a mystery. But instead of being a who-done-it, it would be a what's-going-on. Pieces of a sort of Rube Goldberg machine were being assembled. The viewer might have no idea what the pieces added up to and why they solved the initial problem. Then at the end the machine was set in motion. In fascinating detail all the pieces would fall into place. We could use a real MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE movie. We did not get it. Instead we got a second-rate mystery film on an espionage backdrop with one good tense sequence and a tepid James Bond-style finale.

Twenty-three years after we last saw him, Jim Phelps (now played by Jon Voight instead of Peter Graves) is still around running operations for IMF, the Impossible Mission Force. He has a new team featuring the talents of the hard-edged Ethan Hunt (Tom Cruise playing an E. Howard Hunt-like character with a few new characterization wrinkles for Cruise). The mission as the film begins is to stymie an attempt to steal a list of agents with the code-names and real name. This is the kind of mission that the IMF should be able to do with their eyes closed. This time, however, there are unexpected turns for the IMF and Hunt finds he must on his own solve a mystery and face a mission on his own. Even with this basis the puzzle format of the original series could have been honored. The script could have followed a mysterious sequence of preparations for the tasks he has to perform, but that is approach is thrown out. Instead we hear what his objective is--and it does sound very difficult--and then we just follow him as he does it. There are no hints as to how he will perform that task, we just watch as he does it. The only real puzzle for the viewer is to

guess who is doing what to whom, and it is not made very difficult. The clue that leads to the solution of the mystery is an extreme contrivance involving a character senselessly giving himself away. Perhaps somebody thought that modern audiences might not take well to being asked to puzzle about something that is not straightforward and simple.

Tom Cruise does get a chance to burn a little in anger and to show a little confusion, but in general his character is internalized and this is not a difficult character to play. This might have been a good role for Kevin Spacey to play. Second billing goes to the Jon Voight whose Jim Phelps overshadows much of the film though he quickly disappears from sight. Somewhat more memorable is Vanessa Redgrave as a mysterious woman from the dark side of the night world. Cruise is teamed with Emmanuelle Beart of MANON OF THE SPRINGS, UN COEUR EN HIVER, and more recently NELLY ET MONSIEUR ARNAUD. Beart is a talented actress, but this is not her kind of role and she brings nothing to it. Danny Elfman does bring something to the musical score, but mostly his touch is not needed. I got a genuine chill down my spine with the spectacular opening rendition of Lalo Schifrin theme done with a full orchestra. For me that was the high point of the film. One of the low-points with the disco version under the closing credits.

In the final analysis, the big fault of MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE is that the title makes promises that the script cannot fulfill. There are better spy films that have come and gone with far less fanfare. Perhaps this would have worked better if Zallian had followed through and written the script. A better script would have gone a long way to improving this film. I rate it a low +1 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

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When I was a boy I was told that anybody could become
President; I'm beginning to believe it.
--Clarence Darrow

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