

the countries of what we once called the "Free" World getting together to show how much they hate each other and all pledging money to help support the former Soviet Union. Now I say they don't get another penny from us or anyone else until they agree to go back and be Soviets again. Let's face it, we all know why the

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Soviet Union fell. The United States was spending godzillions of dollars on defense. Everyone in the United States wanted to get their hands on that money, but we all knew it was needed for defense. The former Soviets aren't dumb, you know. They wanted to get their hands on the same money. The comrades looked at each other and decided the worker's revolution was flailing around anyway. The dead carcass of Soviet communism was worth more than the semi-live body.

So what happens? The Evil Empire closes up shop; all we stop feeling threatened and the money stops going to military bases. The bases close all over the place. All those Americans formerly involved in defense are on the job market. (Hey, does anybody at AT&T need a good, government-trained munitions expert?) And then the former Soviets say they want that former defense money that has freed u to keep freedom alive.

And what are we getting for our money? Well, that Evil Empire, the former Soviet Union, is no longer inflicting itself on the former Eastern Europe. Suddenly all the countries we knew and felt secure with are breaking up or going to war or both. The spirit of self-determination spread to places like Yugoslavia. There was only this one small problem that not everyone agreed what Yugoslavia should be. This is a favor to us? Who says? Well, it seemed like a good idea at the time. And what about the Middle East countries that used to play the United States off against the former Soviet Union? Deep down they liked neither the Western infidels nor the godless communists. But they knew each side would give them aid for not going with the other side. (The principle is related to farm subsidies. Uncle Sugar would rather pay to keep you doing nothing than to have you doing something negative.) When the U.S.S.R. turned up four paws to the moon, the game was over. Now it's just us versus them.

Hey, I won't knock the stress on technology we had during the arms race and the space race and all those other races. How many of us went into math and science because of Sputnik? Why do you think there are so many out-of-work engineers? And lots are because of no arms race and no space race.

Now, enough is enough. I say no more money to the former Soviet Union as long as they stay "former." Well, perhaps some if we can still find some old hardline generals even after the coup. In any case, I say no more funding unless they go Communist again.

2. Paul Chisholm reports:

(From an article by Diane Werts of Newsday, reprinted in the July 11, 1993, Asbury Park [NJ] Press; no direct quote, so no copyright issues.)

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The Museum of Television and Radio (25 West 52nd St., New York, NY, 1-212-621-6600) has an exhibit and screenings of STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION, now through October 3. There are mannequins showing the costumes and makeup for Ferengi, Borgs, Takarans, Cardassians, Nausicans, as well as Guinan, Lwaxana (that's the way it was printed in the article) Troi, and various Starfleet officers. There are also various props: tricorders, phasers, the VISOR that Geordi LaForge uses, etc.

Episodes have been grouped by theme and are being shown, without commercials and on a big screen. Screenings are at 12:30, 2:15, and 4:00 p.m.; there's also a 5:45 p.m. Thursday screening, and screenings at 5:45 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. on Fridays. I have no details beyond that.

Tickets for admission (which include exhibits, screenings, and private viewing consoles for showing various archived shows) are \$5 for adults, \$4 for students, and \$3 for anyone over 65 or under 12 years old. You can order screening tickets up to two weeks in advance (which may be a good idea for weekend screenings).

Hours: closed Mondays; Tuesdays and Wednesdays, noon to 6 p.m.;

Thursdays, noon to 8 p.m.; Fridays, noon to 9 p.m.; Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 6 p.m.

The Museum of Television and Radio contains exhibits and archives of all sorts of broadcasts. They have historical broadcast recordings you can play back. I've been meaning to get there for a while. [-psrc]

3. As we start volume 12, there are a few administrivia details:

The title MT VOID is pronounced "empty void." MT is the abbreviation for the AT&T location at Middletown, where we are based. The "Mt. Holz" part of the name is from MT for Middletown, HO for Holmdel, and LZ for Lincroft locations.

This is volume 12 because while we started the club in 1978, we went back to volume 1 after the divestiture in 1983, thinking the club in what was then American Bell had to be separate. It turned out it didn't, but we stayed with the new numbering.

We welcome reviews, comments, etc., from a l l members. I know it seems as though having the last name of Leeper is a requirement for writing for the VOID, but it's not. Send items for publication to mtgpfs1!ecl (or evelyn.leeper@att.com).

Survey time: we have had some requests to reformat the VOID into a more email-friendly display. This would, however, make the print version less "pretty." If you have a strong preference one way or the other, please let me (mtgpfs1!ecl or evelyn.leeper@att.com)

know whether you prefer print or email format. (There may be some compromise possible; I'm working on it.) [-ecl]

4. The meeting schedule on the first page contains some tentative entries for Nebula nominees. Also in the works is a meeting discussing a speculative science book, and a meeting in which we will show "Science Fiction: Golden Age to Cyberpunk" (as shown on the Arts and Entertainment channel). At some point, the meetings will probably move from Holmdel to Middletown, since several of our Holmdel members are moving and the majority (or at least the

plurality) of regular attendees will then be in Middletown. [-ecl]

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When you hear a man speak of his love for his country,
it is a sign that he expects to be paid for it.
-- H. L. Mencken

IN THE LINE OF FIRE
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: Eastwood's Oscars have given him the clout to make better films, but he is back in a glorified Dirty Harry thriller. Besides a stand-out performance by John Malkovich, this outing offers little new and a lot that is old. Still, it is competently made and so is enjoyable for 126 minutes. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4).

In a suspense film, higher stakes do not make for more suspense. That was the mistake that the James Bond series made up through M_o_o_n_r_a_k_e_r. They started with villains trying to sabotage one missile or just to embarrass the British Secret Service, and at the same time get a decoded. As the series progressed, you eventually got to villains trying to precipitate nuclear war or to destroy all life on Earth. But the best stories had the least flamboyant villains and concentrated on credibility. I mention this because while I_n_t_h_e_L_i_n_e_o_f_F_i_r_e, with its psychotic trying to kill the President, does not have an absurdly exaggerated villain, it is starting to get up there. This is essentially a Dirty Harry film with the stakes upped a little. This is also an anti-violence film like U_n_f_o_r_g_i_v_e_n, but it is an Eastwood sort of anti-violence film. That means that the good guys who survive feel angst over the violence afterward.

Frank Horrigan (played by Clint Eastwood) is an agent for the Secret Service. His independence and his insubordinate attitude get him in trouble with the people for whom he works. And he is just a bit sexist, but for the rare woman who can see beyond the attitude problem he is really a diamond in the rough. In other words, he is just like a Dirty Harry of the Secret Service. The one difference is that Horrigan was the Secret Service agent protecting--or at least trying to protect--Kennedy in Dallas. Twenty-nine (or thirty-three?) years later, he is still in the Secret Service trying to protect the President. But now there is a new assassin who wants to kill the current President. He has nothing special against the Chief Executive, but he really likes the idea of killing a President.

First the bad news. In spite of good advance critical comment, this is a very familiar, if not out-and-out hackneyed, script. The conscienceless killer feels impelled to call the policeman (or Secret service agent) and unburden his neuroses on the man looking for him. It adds to the thrill of the hunt, but it has been done many times since N_o_W_a_y_t_o_T_r_e_a_t_a_L_a_d_y or even the real-life Jack the Ripper murders. And, yes, there is an attractive woman, Lilly

Raines (played by Rene Russo, who looks a lot like Blair Brown) in the Secret Service, and she goes from disliking the obnoxious Eastwood character to feeling sorry for him to bedding him. The plot also has some real stretches of credibility. And it has more than its share of violence, including two scenes that could be disturbing to those who are particularly susceptible being disturbed by movies.

So Clint's Oscars have not earned him better scripts, but at least he gets one heck of a good actor as the assassin. John Malkovich, who usually plays people either icy or irritating, gives a flesh-crawling performance as an assassin who is both. This is a polished and suspenseful action film, perhaps a little more so than Eastwood's pre-U_n_f_o_r_g_i_v_e_n films. Now I recognize that I am assuming that Eastwood was not just an actor on this film but actually had much of the artistic control. That may be a false assumption, but given his recent Oscars, I suspect it is not.

The film is directed by Wolfgang Petersen, who directed the exceptional war film D_a_s_B_o_o_t and the unexceptional science fiction film E_n_e_m_y_M_i_n_e. The score is by Ennio Morricone, who built his reputation on Eastwood's "Man with No Name" films. It's worth seeing as a reasonably crafted suspense film, but a month from now I will barely remember it, while Eastwood's O_u_t_l_a_w_J_o_s_e_y_W_a_l_e_s and U_n_f_o_r_g_i_v_e_n will still be standing out in my memory. I give this one a very flat +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

Three Silent Horrors
An article on film by Mark R. Leeper
Copyright 1993 Mark R. Leeper

I am from the generation of horror film fans that grew up with Forrest J. Ackerman's magazine F_a_m_o_u_s_M_o_n_s_t_e_r_s_o_f_F_i_l_m_l_a_n_d. It was a magazine of dubious literary merits created by a man of questionable writing talent or cinematic taste, but he did grow up with fantasy films of the silent era and he did give his readers a perspective that the horror film had a long and proud history stretching back into the silent era. These days if you read the electronic bulletin boards you often find someone trying to identify a "really old" horror film that turns out to be eight years old. Readers of F_a_m_o_u_s_M_o_n_s_t_e_r_s knew that eight years did not make a film "really old."

Forry's magazine's illustrations made me familiar with cinematic images than the silent days of film and made me anxious to see the whole film. For a handful of films it turned out not to be a really great effort. Silent films like T_h_e_P_h_a_n_t_o_m_o_f_t_h_e
O_p_e_r_a
or M_e_t_r_o_p_o_l_i_s were not very difficult to locate, even in the days before video. They were available. Now advances in video technology have made the seeing of old classic films--and even the owning of copies of those films--far easier than at any time in the past. But even so, some classics have remained out of reach due to

low demand. I am certain I will never see many of the classic silent films of which I have heard. Some, like L_o_n_d_o_n_a_f_t_e_r M_i_d_n_i_g_h_t, are thought to be completely lost. But there are many others I have never heard were available or were lost. It is a rare pleasure when one of these films surfaces. In the last month or so, three classic silent films have become available to me. Three films that until now have been legendary to me are now showing up in my collection.

Those films are T_h_e_H_a_n_d_s_o_f_O_r_l_a_c, W_e_s_t_o_f_Z_a_n_z_i_b_a_r, and T_h_e_M_a_n_W_h_o_L_a_u_g_h_s. W_e_s_t_o_f_Z_a_n_z_i_b_a_r features Lon Chaney (Sr.). The other two feature Conrad Veidt. But Veidt was very much Germany's "Man of a Thousand Faces," just as Chaney was in the United States. The M_a_n_W_h_o_L_a_u_g_h_s may star Veidt, but it has strong echoes of Chaney. It almost certainly was made to recapture the popularity of the T_h_e_H_u_n_c_h_b_a_c_k_o_f_N_o_t_r_e_D_a_m_e and T_h_e_P_h_a_n_t_o_m_o_f_t_h_e_O_p_e_r_a. It too is a period piece with a stigmatized and disfigured central character. T_h_e_M_a_n_W_h_o_L_a_u_g_h_s is almost halfway a Chaney film, being based on a novel by the same author as T_h_e_H_u_n_c_h_b_a_c_k_o_f_N_o_t_r_e_D_a_m_e and using P_h_a_n_t_o_m's co-star, Mary Philbin. All three of these films involve men who have been abused or injured. Each in its own way is a study of stigma.

T_h_e_H_a_n_d_s_o_f_O_r_l_a_c

It is one of the unfortunate characteristics of film that visual images slow down the story-telling. It takes the camera a lot longer to show you images that can be described in less time. Of course, to describe a scene fully one picture is worth a thousand words, but rarely is it necessarily to describe a scene fully in telling a story. Silent film is even slower at telling a story, since a much higher proportion of the story is told by visual images. For this reason, silent films will often be more simple stories than sound films of equivalent length, though they can be

just as much or even more atmospheric. The whole story of T_h_e_H_a_n_d_s_o_f_O_r_l_a_c (1924) could well be told in six or seven sentences--including plot twists I will not reveal.

T_h_e_H_a_n_d_s_o_f_O_r_l_a_c reunites T_h_e_C_a_b_i_n_e_t_o_f_D_r._C_a_l_i_g_a_r_i director and its star. Robert Weine directs the vastly under-appreciated horror actor Conrad Veidt in this adaptation of Maurice Renard's novel. The story should be familiar to any who have seen the three other film versions including M_a_d_L_o_v_e (1935), H_a_n_d_s_o_f_O_r_l_a_c (a.k.a. H_a_n_d_s_o_f_a_S_t_r_a_n_g_l_e_r) (1960), and H_a_n_d_s_O_f_A_S_t_r_a_n_g_e_r (1962). Paul Orlic is a great concert pianist who loses his own hands in a train wreck. In their place, a surgeon grafts the hands of a guillotined knife murderer, Vasseur. To Orlic's horror the hands seem to desire to return to their career of crime. It is an idea that would be used many times in film, but this was the first and perhaps the most stylish use of the idea.

Under Weine's direction, Veidt's acting is very effective as a man almost being dragged around by his own hands. Veidt's face shows increasing madness as the film progresses. Perhaps the most effective image of the film shows a crazed Veidt, a mad look on his face, as his half-clenched hand, filmed in the foreground, seems to be leading or even dragging him. Beyond this the film has a gratuitously Gothic feel, the camera making much of taking place in a cavernous old house with its huge bullet-shaped doorways. It is a style that would later be imitated by Universal Studios in their 30s horror cycle.

More could be done with this story, as Karl Freund's M_a_d_L_o_v_e would prove. Still, the film has enough of its share of effective images to make it worth seeking out.

W_e_s_t_o_f_Z_a_n_z_i_b_a_r

Most people who are fans of horror films--and who know a little something of the history of the horror film--respect the name of Lon Chaney. Chaney is the best-remembered horror actor of the silent era, at least for his silent work. (Karloff, of course, had his share of horror parts in the silent era, but he is remembered much

more for his sound roles.) Chaney is the American horror actor most associated with the silent era. But oddly, his current reputation is based for all but a few horror fans on only two roles and a few stills from other films. It is relatively easy to find opportunity

to see T_h_e_H_u_n_c_h_b_a_c_k_o_f_N_o_t_r_e_D_a_m_e (1923) and T_h_e_P_h_a_n_t_o_m_o_f_t_h_e O_p_e_r_a (1925). But how many of us have seen S_h_a_d_o_w_s (1922), A B_l_i_n_d B_a_r_g_a_i_n (1922), T_h_e_T_r_a_p (1922), or T_h_e S_h_o_c_k (1923)? Films like L_o_n_d_o_n_a_f_t_e_r_M_i_d_n_i_g_h_t (1927) appear to be totally lost. Most of his

other roles require some effort to find. Resurrected for Turner cable television is one of his more interesting efforts, Tod Browning's W_e_s_t_o_f_Z_a_n_z_i_b_a_r.

Browning is best remembered as the director of the 1930 film D_r_a_c_u_l_a, and is a bit less well-remembered for F_r_e_a_k_s (1932), but he has a number of interesting films to his credit. He did several previous films with Chaney including T_h_e_U_n_h_o_l_y_T_h_r_e_e (1925), T_h_e B_l_a_c_k_b_i_r_d (1926), T_h_e_R_o_a_d_t_o M_a_n_d_a_l_a_y (1926), and the lost and legendary L_o_n_d_o_n_A_f_t_e_r_M_i_d_n_i_g_h_t (1927). He is also remembered for two sound era films: M_a_r_k_o_f_t_h_e_V_a_m_p_i_r_e, his 1935 remake of L_o_n_d_o_n a_f_t_e_r_M_i_d_n_i_g_h_t with Bela Lugosi and Lionel Barrymore, and his 1936 D_e_v_i_l_D_o_l_l, again with Barrymore.

The story opens in a London music hall. Phroso the Magician (played by Chaney) is a popular attraction, particularly when he performs the illusion of turning a skeleton into his beautiful wife. How, his wife is more interested in Crane, an ivory trader played by a young and handsome Lionel Barrymore. Phroso gets into a fight with Crane only to have his back broken. The magician has lost both his wife and the use of his legs in one evening. Some years later, Phroso's wife returns from Africa, dying and with Crane's baby. Phroso decides to take revenge on Crane and his daughter. Flash forward eighteen years and Phroso is no more, but in his place is the vengeful mystery man called Dead-Legs. In a cannibal village in the title location, Dead-Legs is hatching a plot to destroy Crane. Using his stage magic to control the superstitious natives, he has Crane's daughter brought to his jungle outpost. There he begins to exact his revenge.

Admittedly, W_e_s_t_o_f_Z_a_n_z_i_b_a_r has a plot that is a bit simplistic and the twists in that plot telegraph themselves well in advance of actually occurring. This makes it difficult to say this is actually a good film by modern standards. But the macabre jungle melodrama is told with more than a little style and the resulting

film is surprisingly enjoyable as an artifact.

We see here two of Chaney's claimed thousand faces. Phroso the Magician's stage make-up is obviously played for a laugh, with Chaney even borrowing a gesture or two from Charlie Chaplin. Out of the stage make-up he looks very normal. But Dead-Legs is something very different, something reptilian. His head is shaved so he looks nearly hairless. Out of his wheelchair, he slithers his way

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lizard-like across the floor not unlike a serpent.

Much of the scripting is dated. Natives have names like King Lunkaboola and Bumbu. There is no Kunta Kinte in Tod Browning's Africa! These are savages who glisten as if they had been laminated. They eat their enemies and have independently invented their own version of Indian suttee. But they are easily fooled by the simplest of stage magic. But underneath everything is a story of deep emotions and Chaney's rubberlike face shows impressive subtlety of expression. In short, this film was worth resurrecting. It does show us more of the range of Chaney's acting skills than has been available previously. _ T _ h _ e _ M _ a _ n _ W _ h _ o _ L _ a _ u _ g _ h _ s

When the 1989 film _ B _ a _ t _ m _ a _ n was being cast there was a strong opinion in many people's minds that Jack Nicholson was perfect for the role of the Joker. Nicholson seems to smirk very naturally, like the Joker. In my opinion, Nicholson made a very bad Joker having the wrong stature and actually the wrong facial structure. I told friends at the time that, just as a historical fact, there was once an actor who really could have looked like the Joker. In fact, the comic book figure of the Joker was visually based on the looks

of Conrad Veidt in the 1928 film _ T _ h _ e _ M _ a _ n _ W _ h _ o _ L _ a _ u _ g _ h _ s. Also, the visage was the inspiration for a later horror film, _ M _ r . _ S _ a _ r _ d _ o _ n _ i _ c _ u _ s (1961). Gwynplaine of _ T _ h _ e _ M _ a _ n _ W _ h _ o _ L _ a _ u _ g _ h _ s, however, was not a villain like his later imitators but like Quasimodo a tragic, noble figure living in a deformed body. _ T _ h _ e _ M _ a _ n _ W _ h _ o _ L _ a _ u _ g _ h _ s is, in fact, an adaptation of a lesser novel in which Victor Hugo explored some of the same themes he employed in _ T _ h _ e _ H _ u _ n _ c _ h _ b _ a _ c _ k _ o _ f _ N _ o _ t _ r _ e _ D _ a _ m _ e .

Gwynplaine was the son of a Scottish nobleman who refused to

vow loyalty to James II of England. The noble was given a double punishment of being executed in the Iron Maiden and of having his son have a surgical operation that twisted his (the son's) mouth into a perpetual grin. Whatever Gwynplaine would ever feel internally, to the world his face would always be a broad grin.

Gwynplaine is eventually adopted into a traveling show where he becomes a famous clown. There he falls in love with a beautiful blind woman, Dea. Dea is played by Mary Philbin, who seems to attract stigmatized lovers, though here she is spared the unmasking scene she withstood in T_h_e_P_h_a_n_t_o_m_o_f_t_h_e_O_p_e_r_a.

But the royal

court of England is not through with the tortured soul with the smiling face.

The plotline of the T_h_e_M_a_n_W_h_o_L_a_u_g_h_s is a bit muddled and confusing. The story features a dog whose intelligence puts Rin-

Tin-Tin to shame. There are good reasons why this film was not the

success for Universal that two similar predecessors, T_h_e_H_u_n_c_h_b_a_c_k_o_f_N_o_t_r_e_D_a_m_e (1923) and T_h_e_P_h_a_n_t_o_m_o_f_t_h_e_O_p_e_r_a (1925), were. But

none of the film's faults can be attributed to the terrific

performance of Conrad Veidt. Given only his eyes for expression

over that horrible grinning mouth, he manages to convey a tremendous

range of emotion. Most people have seen Veidt at most only as Cesar

the Somnambulist in T_h_e_C_a_b_i_n_e_t_o_f_D_r.

C_a_l_i_g_a_r_i and as Colonel

Strasser in C_a_s_a_b_l_a_n_c_a--neither film allowing him much range of emotion. And neither film prepares the viewer for the excellent

range of Veidt's acting in T_h_e_M_a_n_W_h_o_L_a_u_g_h_s.

The centerpiece of the film is a scene in which Josiana, a rather sexy and over-sexed duchess, tries to seduce Gwynplaine with

the latter wanting the love of a sighted woman, but still trying to

hide his mouth from her. Veidt carries the scene masterfully with

his eyes only. (Josiana, incidentally, is played by Olga Baclanova,

who played the villainous Cleopatra in Tod Browning's F_r_e_a_k_s.) This

scene and any scene in which we see Gwynplaine's whole face,

requires two interpretations from the viewer. How would others

interpret the scene if they did not know the smile was meaningless,

and secondly, by looking at Gwynplaine's eyes, can we tell what he is feeling? And Veidt controls both interpretations at the same time--an amazing feat of acting.

 T h e M a n W h o L a u g h s is also an artifact of the advent of sound into films. It has a complete soundtrack, mostly music, but also with sound effects, occasional voices, and a song repeated twice in the film.

The film heavily abridges the Hugo story and reaches a little too far to place a happy ending where Hugo never intended. But while this is a flawed film, it boasts some of the most impressive acting of the silent era. It certainly has sharpened my interest in Veidt. This may be a hard film to find--it took me several years--but it is a film well worth the wait.

These three films show the ability of two similar actors: Chaney the American and Veidt the German. Veidt, incidentally emigrated with the coming of Naziism to Germany. Apparently he returned to Germany for a short visit in 1930 and was held prisoner by the Nazis until Gaumont British Studios were able to get him out safely. (There is a short account of this in Ephraim Katz's F i l m E n c y c l o p e d i a.)

Each

made major contributions to the pre-sound horror film.

SNOW CRASH by Neal Stephenson
Bantam Spectra, 1993 (1992c), ISBN 0-553-56261, \$5.99.

Where was this at Hugo nomination time?

I mean, I had heard some recommendations, but after reading the book, I don't understand why I didn't hear more. To paraphrase from

T h e L i o n i n W i n t e r, why did no one say "Hugo" and think of S n o w C r a s h?

In S n o w C r a s h out hero/protagonist, Hiro Protagonist (yes, it's that sort of novel) starts out as a pizza deliverer for Uncle Enzo's Cosa Nostra Pizza. That's because in the early 21st century, the United States leads the world in four areas: music, movies, software, and high-speed delivery. Forced by circumstances to accept the help of Y.T., a young woman who finds excitement in high-speed skate-boarding as a courier, Hiro soon finds his hacker expertise tested in the Metaverse (Stephenson's version of virtual reality) to fight the "snow crash" virus--a virus that attacks not only computers, but people as well. And it's all connected with ancient Sumeria and the Tower of Babel...

Stephenson has certainly pulled together an unusual assortment of disciplines in this novel. His postulations regarding Sumer seem a bit weak (Sumer may have been the major civilization of its time in the Middle East, but it was not the only civilization, and there were many civilizations isolated from Sumer), and the description of pre-Sumerian cultures and memes does not sound accurate for a number of reasons.

Stephenson avoids the path taken by many cyberpunk/virtual reality authors. He does not create a new language that the reader has to decipher (which concept, by the way, ties into the novel's premise, emphasizing the analogy of the relationship between reality and the novel to the relationship between the novel's reality and its Metaverse). He does use pop culture as a referent; for example, Hiro talks about Captain Kirk beaming up.

Stephenson starts off at a break-neck pace, and by page 40 I found myself thinking, "If he keeps this up for 470 pages, I'm going to be exhausted by the time I finish this book!" Well, he does ease up a bit, but not much. S n o w C r a s h is a roller coaster ride of virtual reality, linguistic theory, the origin of religions, and the future of our culture. I wish I had known about S n o w C r a s h before Hugo nomination time. I h i g h l y recommend S n o w C r a s h.

