



and a bit to Poul Anderson, and a bit to some other people. In addition to the timespan, the book features alien aliens, political struggles, religious wars, and just about everything else. Come join us for details! [-ecl]

2. A couple of weeks ago we discussed Iain Banks's C\_o\_n\_s\_i\_d\_e\_r P\_h\_l\_e\_b\_a\_s, and by request of our Scottish members, here is a summary of that discussion:

What did people like about the book? Well, the Culture is an advanced civilization that a\_c\_t\_s terribly advanced, and Banks pays a lot of attention to society. The book is about a well-thought-out conflict, which is also a different sort of conflict that we have. (The claim was made that as civilizations grow and develop, what they fight wars about changes, and that why we fight wars would be incomprehensible to someone from 500 years ago. This theory was not universally accepted.)

There was a lot of discussion of the appendices. While some people had read this as being about the far future descendents of humanity, it turns out that the action all takes place somewhere else in the galaxy (or maybe on Mars--my own personal theory) during the 13th Century. In any case, the conflict is between the Culture--capitalist, libertarian, almost anarchic--and the Idirans--religious and imperialist. Of course, the Culture has some structure, and does work toward "uplifting" other humanoid races; one person described its function as "the Peace Corps with nuclear weapons." The contrast between the Culture and the Idirans is shown in the choice of ships' names in the two groups. The Idirans have serious names for their ships (e.g., "Hand of God 137"--they also have a l\_o\_t of ships), while the Culture's names are more frivolous (e.g., "Only Slightly Bent").

What did people dislike about the book? Well, there are many unpleasant parts. (Someone on the Net said, "This novel is the only book that has made my stomach churn with nausea.") The argument was made that these parts are necessary to emphasize what can be the result if you have a libertarian, laissez-faire system.

There has also been a recent discussion on the Net about Banks's books. Leif Magnar Kjonnoy says of the background: "The basic premise behind this universe is that there is an interstellar civilization (The Culture), which is so incredibly advanced in technology that there is no longer such a thing as scarcity. No need for war. Humans (actually, I guess they should be called Para-humans) and human-level intelligent machines inhabit various worlds (mostly artificial ones; the Culture seems to go in for small ringworlds and such rather than terraforming planets). Huge sentient computers ("Minds") manage what needs to be managed. Sentient starships (which are large enough to have hundreds of millions of people living in them) rush around at forty thousand times lightspeed. The Culture is just about the most ultimate tech-utopia I've ever seen."

"The stories mostly concern the interactions between the Culture and civilizations outside of the Culture. They contain a lot of

THE MT VOID

Page 3

very nasty things -- people die in horrible ways, and so on. As I already said, I think they're brilliant. You would be well advised to seek out anything Banks has written, SF or not SF (he's written various things outside the SF genre; I haven't got hold of any of those yet, but I know I'll swoop down on anything of his I see on a shelf in any book-store I'm in.)"

In addition, Donn Seeley provided the following bibliographical information generated from an interview with Banks which appeared in Mark Ziesing's JOURNAL WIRED (quotes from Banks derive from the interview). This was written in 1988, so is somewhat out-of-date; AGAINST A DARK BACKGROUND, for example, has just appeared in the United States in mass market paperback.

- THE HUNGARIAN LIFT JET. Written in 1970, unpublished. '[A] spy story, absolutely full of sex and violence, neither of which I'd had any experience with at the time [laughter].'
- TTR. Written in 1972, unpublished. 'Just gigantic. ... It had a cast of thousands and was very silly.' Quasi-SF in the mold of CATCH-22 and STAND ON ZANZIBAR.
- THE USE OF WEAPONS. Written in 1974 or 1975, unpublished in its original version; apparently rewritten in the summer of

1989 for publication. SF; the first novel of the Culture.

Like the later novels THE PLAYER OF GAMES and CONSIDER PHLEBAS, it apparently concerns a misfit or outsider in the interstellar utopian anarchy of the Culture.

- AGAINST A DARK BACKGROUND. Written after WEAPONS; unpublished. SF but not connected to the Culture stories.
- THE PLAYER OF GAMES. Written three years after BACKGROUND, published in 1988 after a bit of rewriting. The second Culture novel. A story about the nature of competition and cooperation that takes place on a planet where society is built around an incredibly complex game. Fun, although the politics is a bit heavy-handed.
- THE STATE OF THE ART. Written in 1979, published in 1989 after some polishing. A novella about Earth and the Culture published as a book. A Culture starship discovers Earth and members of the crew have different reactions to our own culture circa 1977. How does a utopia like the Culture react to an ugly mess like Earth? Some interesting insights into the Culture but the story doesn't stand by itself.
- THE WASP FACTORY. Banks's sixth novel, first one published, in 1984. The first book 'that I did a second draft on.' As for content -- to quote the author, 'Well, you can call THE WASP FACTORY a lot of things, but MEDIOCRE it AIN'T.' If you had to classify it, I suppose you could call it 'psychological horror'. FACTORY made a big stir in the UK when it came out -- some people found it pretty shocking. It's great fun even when it's being egregiously nasty... Highly recommended.
- CONSIDER PHLEBAS. Written after FACTORY; published in 1987, making it the first published Culture novel. A big and gaudy

novel, written as a kind of send-up of or tribute to classic space opera. As space opera, it kicks ass -- plus it's wonderfully funny. Says Mr Banks: 'CONSIDER PHLEBAS would make a fucking BRILLIANT film...' It would, too.

- WALKING ON GLASS. Written after PHLEBAS; published in 1985. Very complex novel about the different ways people experience reality. Reminds me of Phil Dick and Christopher Priest. Hey, and it's funny too. I read this first and I still think it's great, but David Hartwell didn't like it and you might not either. De gustibus.

- O. Written after GLASS; unpublished. 'It wasn't very good...'
- THE BRIDGE. Written after O; published in 1986. Very strange fantasy about a man who finds himself in a world where civilization is built on an infinite bridge over an infinite sea. It contains some bits from the unpublished novel O. The editor had Banks cut some 40,000 words from the novel; Banks mentions the idea of publishing an unabridged BRIDGE someday. However, he says: 'I'm certainly very happy with the way it IS' -- the book is still very effective. I liked it a lot.
- ESPEDAIR STREET. Written after BRIDGE; published in 1987. A novel about the career of a rock musician from Scotland who makes it big but falls from grace. I liked it but I wasn't overwhelmed; it's a nice character study with many details from the music business.
- CANAL DREAMS. Written after the rewrite of GAMES; published 1989. A short novel that combines a character study of a classical musician with nail-biting suspense. The musician is a woman cello player from Japan, so it's more exotic than it might sound. I rather liked it.

Forthcoming: The rewritten WEAPONS for 1989; a new non-SF book for 1990 ('something more like THE BRIDGE, that complicated and intricate [but] a bit bigger, beefier, as it were, the size of PHLEBAS perhaps'); the rewrite of BACKGROUND for 1991.

3. With the proving of Fermat's Last Theorem, we have passed one of those oh-so-rare instants of time when the American public is suddenly aware that there is mathematics. Oh, many people knew at one time that there was mathematics, just like most people over thirty have heard that there is a country called "Malaysia" somewhere. But the majority of Americans go for years without thinking about Malaysia or any math beyond simple arithmetic. The public in general thinks of mathematicians about how they think of professional golfers--people who are doing something totally non-productive and being paid for it. Except some of the public understands the appeal of golf. As for the value the American public places on mathematics, it ranks considerably below nail polish and roughly on a par with those two plastic balls on a string that you twirl in opposite directions and which hit each other with an annoying clack-clack-clack noise.

The last time the public got some interest in any higher math, it was a group theory problem wrapped in plastic called "Rubik's Cube." And even with Rubik's Cube it was mostly children who were interested. I had a weird experience with Rubik's Cube, by the way. This is true. We were meeting a friend in Manhattan during the craze and I was waiting in a hotel lobby and playing with a Cube I had been carrying. After about ten minutes I looked up and realized there was around me a ring of Japanese businessmen, just intently watching how I went about solving the Cube. They smiled at me, and I smiled back, but I knew in that instant that the race was over and America could not hope to compete with a country whose businessmen are more interested in learning something as abstract as a Rubik's Cube when they could have been sitting in a bar or watching television or just sitting and doing something non-productive. At the time I tried to tell people about the incident and my conclusions, but the reaction I got back at that point was that a country that eats raw fish and makes Godzilla movies did not seem to be anybody's idea of a serious threat.

4. The 1993 Hugo winners are:

Novel: A\_F\_i\_r\_e\_U\_p\_o\_n\_t\_h\_e\_D\_e\_e\_p by Vernor Vinge (Tor) and  
and D\_o\_o\_m\_s\_d\_a\_y\_B\_o\_o\_k by Connie Willis (Bantam) (tie)

Novella: "Barnacle Bill the Spacer" by Lucius Shepard  
(A\_s\_i\_m\_o\_v'\_s July)

Novelette: "The Nutcracker Coup" by Janet Kagan (A\_s\_i\_m\_o\_v'\_s Dec)

Short Story: "Even the Queen" by Connie Willis (A\_s\_i\_m\_o\_v'\_s Apr)

Non-Fiction Book: A\_W\_e\_a\_l\_t\_h\_o\_f\_F\_a\_b\_l\_e: A\_n\_i\_n\_f\_o\_r\_m\_a\_l\_h\_i\_s\_t\_o\_r\_y\_o\_f\_s\_c\_i\_e\_n\_c\_e\_f\_i\_c\_t\_i\_o\_n\_f\_a\_n\_d\_o\_m\_i\_n\_t\_h\_e\_1\_9\_5\_0\_s by Harry Warner Jr. (SCIFI)

Dramatic Presentation: "The Inner Light" (S\_t\_a\_r\_T\_r\_e\_k: T\_h\_e\_N\_e\_x\_t\_G\_e\_n\_e\_r\_a\_t\_i\_o\_n) (Paramount Television)

Professional Editor: Gardner Dozois (A\_s\_i\_m\_o\_v'\_s, various anthologies)

Professional Artist: Don Maitz

Original Artwork: D\_i\_n\_o\_t\_o\_p\_i\_a by James Gurney (Turner)

Semi-Prozine: S\_c\_i\_e\_n\_c\_e\_F\_i\_c\_t\_i\_o\_n\_C\_h\_r\_o\_n\_i\_c\_l\_e edited by Andy Porter

Fanzine: M\_i\_m\_o\_s\_a edited by Dick and Nicki Lynch

Fan Writer: Dave Langford

Fan Artist: Peggy Ranson

John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer of 1991-1992  
(Sponsored by Dell Magazines): Laura Resnick

5. THE QUARREL (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: Two men, old friends and adversaries with different theological perspectives have each assumed the other died in the Holocaust. Years later they meet by accident and continue a riveting philosophical argument of faith vs. rationalism. Extremely intelligent and rewarding.  
Rating: +2 (-4 to +4).

Chaim Kovler (played by R. H. Thomson) survived the Holocaust, but lost his wife and children to the Nazis. He also lost his best friend and worst philosophical opponent Hersh Rasseynner. And while he still believes in the existence of God, he no longer cares since he blames God for allowing the Holocaust. Even back at religious school as a boy he had his own ideas about religion and God. Now a year or so after the end of the war he is living in the United States and has become a popular novelist and advice columnist. Visiting Montreal, on the morning of a Rosh Hashonah that he chooses not to acknowledge, he finds Hersh (played by Saul Rubinek) alive and a very Orthodox rabbi. The two men, one staunchly religious, the other just as staunchly a rationalist finally have a chance to talk out their different world-views after being separated for so long and with so much tragedy that has happened to each of them. If this sounds a lot like all too many Sunday morning television religious dramas, it is not. This is not the story of somebody regaining his faith after a few pat religious arguments. It is a fair and even-handed exploration of two valid but diametrically opposed philosophical points of view. Chaim Grade's story, adapted into a play by David Brandes and directed by Eli Cohen, is itself at times coldly rational, at others sad and moving.

The two old friends meet in park and argue not just about religion, but about rain and the paths in the park and anything else that can momentarily distract them from their real and fundamental philosophical differences--which they will be resuming shortly.

This is not the first time these three--Rubinek, Thomson, and religious differences--have come together. Rubinek was a man trying to get his friend out of a religious cult and Thomson was a deprogrammer in the excellent 1982 film T\_i\_c\_k\_e\_t\_t\_o\_H\_e\_a\_v\_e\_n. They are both very good actors, albeit very different types, and they are very good on the screen together. But while a few films were made on religious cults (T\_i\_c\_k\_e\_t\_t\_o\_H\_e\_a\_v\_e\_n is merely the best of the lot) T\_h\_e\_Q\_u\_a\_r\_r\_e\_l is in a category by itself. Few films have respected their audience sufficiently to give them this density of ideas and concepts. You basically would have to have a two character play that is solid dialog. In fact, cinema is probably not the best medium for this story. At the risk of saying "this is a great

film, but don't go" I have to say that the best way to appreciate this film will be on a videotape that will allow you both to see the actors expressions and will allow you to go back and replay portions to better take in what is being said. And since T\_h\_e Q\_u\_a\_r\_r\_e\_l is a theatrical release of American Playhouse (like the film I saw minutes before it, T\_h\_e M\_u\_s\_i\_c o\_f C\_h\_a\_n\_c\_e) it will almost certainly show up on PBS sooner or later. However, with that one minimal cavil, this film is recommended. I give it a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

THE MT VOID

Page 7

#### 6. THE MUSIC OF CHANCE (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: This is a very unusual allegory about two modern men trapped by fate in a feudal world. Where they are forced to build a wall for two unearthly old men who seem to have supernatural powers. The story is full of ambiguity and uncertainty, and is always riveting. Rating +2 (-4 to +4).

The rise of feudalism, power of money, and considerably more are the subject of an odd, allegorical film of two people caught up in a very weird vortex of circumstance. This little film has a "Twilight Zone" surrealism, but definitely keeps the viewer on edge as to what is going to happen next. T\_h\_e M\_u\_s\_i\_c o\_f C\_h\_a\_n\_c\_e is

a strange film about about two men who virtually become serfs in modern day Pennsylvania. Jim Nashe (played by Mandy Patinkin) picks up on a road a stranger who calls himself Jack Pozzi (played by James Spader) and is pulled into Pozzi's scheme to win large sums of money playing poker with two old multi-millionaires named Stone and Flower (played by Joel Gray and Charles Durning). Stone and Flower have an immense fortune built on top of a lottery win and have used it to insulate themselves from the real world and replace it with a perfectly functioning model world. They even have a little dollhouse model of their ideal world and are recreating it in real life. Pozzi has played poker with the two



old men before and thinks that they will be easy marks if he takes them up on their invitation and play them again. Nashe stakes him to the money he will need, but things go wrong and Nashe and Pozzi find themselves owing the old men. To pay off he debt they must build a wall on the vast estate of Flower and Stone. This task is placed under the supervision of a particularly insensitive functionary played by M. Emmet Walsh.

There is a lot that is strange but compelling about this story. There is a hypnotic quality to Flower telling with absolute lack of self-doubt how they built their fortune and authoritatively philosophizing about the world. There is almost a supernatural quality about how the two men--dressed entirely in white--control the world around them, much of it modeled in miniature in their scale model. They are reminiscent of the gods on Olympus in J\_a\_s\_o\_n \_a\_n\_d\_t\_h\_e\_A\_r\_g\_o\_n\_a\_u\_t\_s who control the lives of humans, manipulating them with little models.

This is a story that has a very literary feel. It is based on a novel by Paul Auster and clearly has a very literary sensibility. In some ways it is a sort of fantasy akin to the writings of Franz Kafka. Ambiguity and uncertainty as to what is actually molding the fate of Nashe and Pozzi abound. Does the model world affect what is happening to our characters? Once they are limited to receiving their information from their overseer, how much of what he tells

THE MT VOID

Page 8

them can be believed? Perhaps the only false move in this compelling story is the very last scene which is a little cliched.

However, T\_h\_e\_M\_u\_s\_i\_c\_o\_f\_C\_h\_a\_n\_c\_e is a compelling allegory and a genuine pleasure in its originality. My rating would be a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

Mark Leeper  
MT 3D-441 908-957-5619  
leeper@mtgzfs3.att.com

The idealist walks on his toes, the materialist on his talons.  
-- Maurice de Chazal