

hand, and one of the rest of her research team left behind (ahead?) in the early 21st Century. Kirvin was sent back to 1320, well before the Black Plague burst into Europe, but falls ill almost immediately upon arriving. In addition, immediately after sending Kirvin back in time, the technician collapses with an unknown flu-

THE MT VOID

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like illness, and cannot report the exactly when Kirvin landed.

This is a book about sickness and plagues and dying, and how people react to it. Though Willis does an excellent job on the 14th Century details, it is the parallelism that is unique here. For all our progress, Willis says, a new disease can easily bring us back to the problems of 600 years ago.

And for one final recommendation, I am nominating D_o_o_m_s_d_a_y_B_o_o_k for the Hugo next year. But even if you haven't read it, join us for the discussion, which will undoubtedly extend to the topics of plagues in science fiction and plagues in real life. [-ecl]

2. I recently spent some time in Puerto Rico. There are good aspects and bad aspects of Puerto Rico but in one way the traveler or foreigner has a real disadvantage there. That is, in figuring out the money. You always have to spend a few minutes figuring out the money when you go overseas, but the currency in Puerto Rico is the worst and most difficult to figure out of any country we have visited. Usually a country will have two units of currency, and usually they will have a ratio of 100 to 1. The coins will have a numeral and the units of currency. Well, they start out okay with the big unit being something called a "dollar" and with the bills at least having numerals to show how many dollars they represent. I am pretty sure a dollar is the figure they show with an S and a bar through it, but I just don't see that figure on the bill anywhere. Oh, and of course, the bills are all the same size, so it is really tough to tell them apart by feel. I pity a blind Puerto Rican.

The coins have denominations spelled out in words that are not even in the local language. They say things like "one cent" or "five cents"; "1 cent" and "5 cents" might be better. Now we get into fractions as well as words. The big coin says "quarter dollar."

If I have my ratio right, and I am not sure I do, this is 25 cents. I also got in my change something from what must be a foreign currency. It is labeled "one dime." None of the other coins or bills say how many dimes they are, so I at first assumed it came from some previous system of currency or some other country. It is smaller than a cent but it is silver like a five-cent piece. It probably is something like a half a cent. A five-cent piece is the next larger silver coin and I can't think what else would divide into five cents. That would make 200 dimes to a dollar. I guess it does say "United States" like the others, but no other coin measures its value in dimes. Also I asked a man where I could find someone who would give me 200 dimes for my dollar and he just walked away. I think what I'd have to do is ask someone to break a five-cent piece and give me my change all in dimes and I'd see how many I get. I can easily see how this weird currency could drive the Puerto Ricans to the bughouse.

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THE MULTIPLEX MAN by James P. Hogan
Bantam, 1992, ISBN 0-553-08999-4, \$20.
A book review by Mark R. Leeper
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The Multiplex Man is the kind of novel Robert Sheckley would have written in the 1950s and 1960s if he had been able to get his tongue out of his cheek long enough to write it. He used to write satiric novels set in the next century with trends of this century taken a step too far. Also, body switching was a favorite theme of Sheckley novels. Of course, Sheckley was no scientist, so he explained body switch technology with hocus-pocus and smoke and mirrors. James Hogan was an aeronautical engineer before he turned to science fiction, so he is able to write a convincing explanation about how body-switching or, more accurately, personality-switching might be done. This is a story told from several points of view, but always from the point of view of whomever it is who currently has the body in question. We start with Jarrow, a school teacher who one day wakes up in a body he does not recognize.

As with a Sheckley story, the foreground is really just distraction. The real point of the story is to show you a world in which something has gone very wrong. In this setting there are conflicts between the people still living on Earth and people who live off-world: the moon, Mars, maybe O'Neill colonies. Off-worlders are in favor of technology and expansion. However, on Earth the repressive governments are forcing caution and conservation down everyone's throat. The most repressive government is the United States. Asia and the former Soviet Union ended up being where people were able and willing to use technology and they now lead the world. In the United States the Green Party seems to have accomplished getting us only brave new warning labels. Unhealthy foods are disappearing as living becomes safer, but the society is stagnating.

But in this world the repressive government is willing to try new technology if it helps its own ends. And one new method allows the mind to be treated as a computer personality--to be treated as programs. It can be stored and downloaded to different brains. And in explaining how this can be done in reasonably scientific terms, Hogan gives a hard science edge where Sheckley was always treading in fantasy.

The body is owned by characters on each side of the controversy, but it is clear where Hogan's sympathies lie. As an adventure, it is decent, but not great. But, of course, the adventure story is not really the point.

THE HOLLOW MAN by Dan Simmons
Bantam, 1992, ISBN 0-553-08252-3, \$20.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
Copyright 1992 Evelyn C. Leeper

Sometimes the short story is better.

For T_h_e_H_o_l_l_o_w_M_a_n, Simmons took his short story "Eyes I Dare

Not Meet in Dreams" (which I liked very much in his collection P_r_a_y_e_r_s_t_o_B_r_o_k_e_n_S_t_o_n_e_s), threw in the Vanni Fucci character from "Vanni Fucci Is Alive and Well and Living in Hell" (also in P_r_a_y_e_r_s_t_o_B_r_o_k_e_n_S_t_o_n_e_s), added a little background for the main character and a lot of gratuitous horror in a whole new section stuffed in the middle (shades of Richard Kiel's character from the James Bond films), and produced a novel significantly worse than any of its sources (except maybe the Bond films). As an example of how so much is misdirected in the novel, I will merely say that when a member of the Mafia dumps a body in a deserted swamp and looks up to see a witness, he does n_o_t take that witness to Disneyland.

Read the short story instead.

NIGHT AND THE CITY
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: DeNiro plays an incorrigible, sleazy promoter trying to arrange a night of boxing in this remake of the British 1951 film by Jules Dassin. The main character is not likable but the story is told with energy and style. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4).

About the best thing you can say about Harry Fabian (as played by Robert DeNiro) is that he has a lot of energy and ambition. Harry is a high-powered promoter of sleazy schemes. In spite of Harry's surface likability and ever-endearing demeanor, even Harry's closest friends cannot or should not trust Harry anywhere near money. Harry is a lawyer who has become so well known for his ambulance-chasing that he has to supplement his income by any other scheme he can put together. His latest scheme is to promote a night of local boxers fighting each other, but the scheme is elaborate and the financing shady. And Fabian will use whomever he has to in order to make himself a big fight promoter for one night and at the same time gall "Boom Boom" Grossman (played by Alan King), a well known local fight promoter.

Jessica Lange stars as Helen, who owns a bar with her husband Phil (played by Cliff Gorman), but who is also fooling around with Fabian. The supporting cast includes Jack Warden and Eli Wallach. But the main show is the frenetic Harry Fabian, who is almost never off-camera and seems to live at 10% greater speed than the rest of us. He has to do so that in the middle of one scheme he can get involved with another one, like selling probably-stolen VCRs. "Sell these for \$400, keep \$200," his friend Gupta tells him, and Harry is off on a second scheme.

The dialogue in Richard Price's screenplay is fast and often funny in a bitter, ironic way. Harry's various inter-connected schemes build a sort of "Mission Impossible" house-of-cards plan where the impossible mission is to make this cheap hustler into a success. Irwin Winkler's direction and Tak Fujimoto's photography pick up the grunginess and oppressiveness of the New York City streets with the immediacy of hand-held Steadicam. Popular songs from the 1950s and 1960s run a commentary on the action of the film, as when Fabian runs a scam to the tune of "The Great Pretender."

In spite of a lack of likable characters, N_i_g_h_t_a_n_d_t_h_e_C_i_t_y shows us the life of the underbelly and a few interesting machinations. I gave it a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

ZEBRAHEAD

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: This is a realistic but far too open-ended story of racial tensions that may or may not have led to violence. Story of a white Jewish boy dating a black girl and its eventual outcome by neophyte writer-director Anthony Drazen avoids being too obviously a Romeo-and-Juliet story, but ends up muddling whatever point it was trying to make.
Rating: low +1 (-4 to +4).

The setting is Detroit in what was once a middle-class neighborhood. Now it is run-down, bombed-out, and polluted over. One guy in the neighborhood likes to set fire to his lawn and see it burn in jets of flame from some flammable pollutant in the soil. These days the people who live in this neighborhood are people who have no other choice. The area is dominated by blacks, with some Asians, Hispanics, and Jews mixed in. Zack Glass (played by Michael Rapaport) is a Jew, but his culture and friends are black. Zack's father Richard (played by Ray Sharkey) runs a record store. Richard has two interests in life: making sure he and his son are getting enough sex, and listening to black music from the 1950s and 1960s.

Zack's best friend Dee (played by DeShonn Castle) is black. Through him Zack meets Dee's beautiful cousin Nikki (played by N'Bushe Wright). When Zack starts dating Nikki, their friends and family are not sure what to make of the situation. There seems to be a suspicion that a white-black relationship will not work out, but this is not "Romeo and Juliet" or "West Side Story." This is not a story of whites and blacks at war, but there are tensions that set events in motion that do lead to violence.

Z_e_b_r_a_h_e_a_d is not a simplistic story. Even when violence does occur it is left open to the viewer's interpretation whether or not the violence even can be termed a racial incident. Anthony Drazen has shown us the background for an incident without tying it up and

making it simple. As a first-time writer and director he has told a story that is probably near his own experience and his characters both talk and act realistically. Most are also acting for the first time and probably playing characters much like themselves. The only familiar face is, in fact, Ray Sharkey, a rather good actor who takes James Woods sorts of roles. The dialogue and acting are both quite acceptable considering the overall lack of experience. Only the ambiguity of the events of the story works against the film. However, one does get to the end of this film expecting some point to have been made a little more strongly than Drazen has. The "Okay, so what?" dissatisfied feeling does not serve this film well. As a result, I give it a low +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

Hugo Recommendations from NESFA
(provided by Jim Mann)

[I am providing this as is off Usenet. Needless to say, I have my own opinions on what is missing from this list. We will probably schedule a meeting in late december or early January to dicuss what _ w_ e think the "Good Stuff" is. -Evelyn Leeper]

Every year, NESFA (the New England SF Association) has a series of discussion groups on the Hugos. We sit around and tell one another what we think is good, what is worth reading and worth at least considering at Hugo time, etc. This year, we decided to take notes, to try to pass our recommendations along to others who might be looking for something good to read. Besides, it's always a good way to start a discussion.

The purpose of this list is to provide tips on Good Stuff to read. (The number in the last column is the number of people who recommended the books listed, out of eighteen participants.)

Novels

- _ C_ o_ u_ n_ t_ G_ e_ i_ g_ e_ r'_ s_ B_ l_ u_ e_ s, Michael Bishop (1)
- _ A_ n_ v_ i_ l_ o_ f_ S_ t_ a_ r_ s, Greg Bear (1)
- _ H_ a_ r_ d_ L_ a_ n_ d_ i_ n_ g, Algis Budrys (1)
- _ S_ e_ r_ v_ a_ n_ t_ o_ f_ t_ h_ e_ E_ m_ p_ i_ r_ e, Raymond Feist

(1)

- (1) J_u_m_p_e_r, Steve Gould (3)
 W_o_r_l_d_s_E_n_o_u_g_h_a_n_d_T_i_m_e, Joe Haldeman
- (1) F_a_t_h_e_r_l_a_n_d, Robert Harris (4)
 R_e_s_u_r_r_e_c_t_i_o_n(n_o_v_e_l_l_a?), Katherine Kerr
- (1) J_a_c_k_t_h_e_B_o_d_i_l_e_s_s, Julian May (1)
 G_l_a_s_s_H_o_u_s_e_s, Laura Mixon (4)
 F_l_y_i_n_g_i_n_P_l_a_c_e, Susan Palwick (3)
 L_a_s_t_C_a_l_l, Tim Powers (2)
 D_r_e_a_m_s_h_i_p_s, Melissa Scott (1)
 C_o_l_d_a_s_I_c_e, Charles Sheffield (1)
 T_h_e_G_r_a_i_l_o_f_H_e_a_r_t_s, Susan Shwartz (2)
 G_u_n_s_o_f_t_h_e_S_o_u_t_h, Harry Turtledove (1)
 A_F_i_r_e_U_p_o_n_t_h_e_D_e_e_p, Vernor Vinge (9)
 A_r_i_s_t_o_i, Walter Jon Williams (2)
 B_r_i_a_r_R_o_s_e, Jane Yolen (2)

Short Fiction

- "Faith," Poul and Karen Anderson (A_f_t_e_r_t_h_e_K_i_n_g) (1)
 "Silver or Gold," Emma Bull (A_f_t_e_r_t_h_e_K_i_n_g) (2)
 "The Winterberry," Nicholas DiChario (A_l_t._K_e_n_n_e_d_y_s) (3)
 "Stopping at Slowyear," Fred Pohl (1)

- "A Long Night's Vigil at the Temple," Robert Silverberg (1)
 (A_f_t_e_r_t_h_e_K_i_n_g)
 "The Seven Swans," Lois Tilton (1)

Non Fiction

- L_e_t'_s_H_e_a_r_I_t_f_o_r_t_h_e_D_e_a_f_M_a_n, Dave Langford (3)
 D_i_n_o_t_o_p_i_a (novella?), Jim Gurney (3)
 A_W_e_a_l_t_h_o_f_F_a_b_l_e, Harry Warner (3)

The following items have been noted as having received good reviews, but have not yet been recommended by any NESFAn:

Novels

John Barnes: _ A _ M _ i _ l _ l _ i _ o _ n _ O _ p _ e _ n _ D _ o _ o _ r _ s
Orson Scott Card: _ T _ h _ e _ M _ e _ m _ o _ r _ y _ o _ f _ E _ a _ r _ t _ h
Doris Egan: _ Q _ u _ a _ r _ a _ n _ t _ i _ n _ e
Guy Gaverial Kay: _ A _ S _ o _ n _ g _ f _ o _ r _ A _ r _ d _ o _ n _ n _ a
Ian McDonald: _ T _ h _ e _ B _ r _ o _ k _ e _ n _ L _ a _ n _ d
Michael Kube-McDowell: _ E _ x _ i _ l _ e
Kim Stanley Robinson: _ R _ e _ d _ M _ a _ r _ s
Dan Simmons: _ T _ h _ e _ H _ o _ l _ l _ o _ w _ M _ a _ n
Sheri Tepper: _ S _ i _ d _ e _ s _ h _ o _ w
John Varley: _ S _ t _ e _ e _ l _ B _ e _ a _ c _ h

Other

Jane Yolen: _ S _ t _ o _ r _ y _ t _ e _ l _ l _ e _ r (contains substantial non-fiction)