



Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
Club Notice - 01/22/93 -- Vol. 11, No. 30

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are in Holmdel 4N-509
Wednesdays at noon.

_D_A_T_E _T_O_P_I_C

- 01/27 THE ENGINES OF CREATION by K. Eric Drexler (The Final Tool)
02/17 ENTOVERSE by James P. Hogan (Fantasy Written as Hard SF)
03/10 STEEL BEACH by John Varley (Near-Future Utopias-- Or Are They?)
03/31 WEST OF EDEN by Harry Harrison (Primitive Humans Vs. Alternatively-Evolved Bio-Tech-Advanced Reptiles)
03/31 Deadline for Hugo Nominations
04/21 ARISTOI by Walter Jon Williams (If This--AI, Virtual Reality, Nanotech--Goes On)
05/12 THOMAS THE RHYMER by Ellen Kushner (Fantasy in a Modern Vein)
06/02 WORLD AT THE END OF TIME by Frederik Pohl (Modern Stapledonian Fiction)
06/23 CONSIDER PHLEBAS by Iain Banks (Space Opera with a Knife Twist)
07/14 SIGHT OF PROTEUS by Charles Sheffield (Human Metamorphosis)

HO Chair: John Jetzt HO 1E-525 908-834-1563 hocpb!jetzt
LZ Chair: Rob Mitchell HO 1D-505A 908-834-1267 hocpb!jrjt
MT Chair: Mark Leeper MT 3D-441 908-957-5619 mtgzfs3!leeper
HO Librarian: Nick Sauer HO 4F-427 908-949-7076 homxc!11366ns
LZ Librarian: Lance Larsen LZ 3L-312 908-576-3346 mtfme!lfl
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1. Our next discussion will be about a science book. In an attempt to provide background for many of today's novels, it has been suggested we read Eric Drexler's _E_n_g_i_n_e_s_o_f_C_r_e_a_t_i_o_n, and here is what Dale Skran has to say about it:

After laser, moon rockets, and biotech, what is the hottest of the hot technology? Nanotech! If you don't know what it means, you are out of it! Looking for the latest techie wet-dream? Nanotech! Want a diamond rocket engine? Nanotech? Want to live forever?

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Nanotech! Want to meet Keith Henson at the "Far Edge" party? Definitely Nanotech!

Eric Drexler's E_n_g_i_n_e_s_o_f_C_r_e_a_t_i_o_n details how tiny engines could be used to perform arbitrary physical feats with masses of garbage. Imagine an industrial technology that could construct a rocket engine out of perfect diamond one atom at a time! Whatever this "nanotech" stuff is, I want it! You can find out more about it at our next meeting.

2. It looks like the local town of Marlboro has deemed the Virgin Mary is an attractive nuisance. Since nobody really remembers what she looked like, it seems odd to rule that she is attractive in the usual sense, but attract she does. Some of you people might already have heard, but according to one resident of Marlboro, she has been showing up quite regularly in his back yard. Last summer the gentleman went public with this case of "miraculous trespass." Local church authorities have questioned the man and remain dubious that it is really the woman he claims it is. I know my first question would be how he recognized her and the next thing I would do is get a police sketch artist to get her divine features on paper. Actually, I would get about eight sketches of different women included the Blessed Virgin and head for Medugorje, Croatia. I'd see if the women there who have been seeing Mary show up regularly could pick Mary out of a line-up. Is it the same Mary? Is it a franchise?

Anyway, since last summer huge crowds of Blessed Virgin groupies have been showing up to get their own glimpse of the little lady. I have heard no positive results, so far. Anyway, the local police have told the guy that if he persists in seeing the Virgin Mary and telling people, he has to provide portable toilets for the throngs of believers. This is a very interesting precedent. Be warned that you can now be held legally responsible for any religious

visions you have. Would-be Joans of Arc, be warned. Before you may allow yourself the luxury of telling others about your miraculous experiences, better check to see if you can afford to fund the result.

Say, I wonder if I can buy vision insurance.

3. Members of the club, and people at AT&T in general, that the security people at the door are insufficient to prevent some weirdos getting in the door and counterfeiting messages from authentic AT&T people. Bitten in this case was long-time member Ihor Kinal who apparently left his terminal unguarded and open for someone to counterfeit the following message:

I'm shocked, REALLY SHOCKED to find the lack of accuracy on calendar re-cycling [re Susan Hallander's message about 14 different calendars].

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SIMPLE math shows that in every period of 11 years, there must be 3 leap years. [Barring the quirks at the 100 year cycles not divisible by 400]. Consequently, calendars re-cycle every ELEVEN years. I'm amazed that this inaccuracy was first allowed to propagate and that furthermore, your astute and varied readership has not brought you to task,

I am certain that the r_e_a_l Ihor Kinal would know that 1960, 33 years ago, was a leap year and would not have a calendar identical to the 1993 calendar. I choose to believe that the real Ihor would accept my statement that the real cycle is 28 years (as long as your stay away from a century mark not divisible by 4). The problem is perhaps this weirdo who passed himself off as Ihor tried to use math that was perhaps, as he said "s_i_m_p_l_e math" but, in fact, simpler than the problem warranted. Unfortunately if math this s_i_m_p_l_e is being taught in the schools, it is no wonder that the Japanese are whipping our butts in the marketplace.

To which Ihor replied:

OK, I'll admit my foolhardiness - 11 years is only

the cycle for the initial days of the calendar. A reference shows a perpetual calendar with 14 different calendars - why do you claim 28???

There are 14 different calendars, but the cycle is 28 years. Why 14 calendars? There are 7 different days that the year can start on and two different lengths of the year or 14 possible calendars. However the cycle is 28 years (assuming your stay clear of years that are multiples of 100, but not 400). 4 (the cycle for adding a day) and 7 (the number of days in a week) are relatively prime. That makes it very likely at the start that the cycle would be 4 times 7 or 28.

But is it? Yes! Think of it this way. 1992 was a leap year and it started on a Wednesday. 1996 will be a leap year and it will start two days earlier in the week, on a Monday. 2000 will be a leap year again, and it will start two days earlier in the week or on a Saturday. Each time you move forward four years the starting day of the leap year moves back two days (or ahead five, which is the same thing) because in four years there are always the same number of days $(3 \times 365) + 366$ and that number is two days short of being a multiple of 7. We will have to go through 7 4-year cycles before the starting day of the leap year will again be Wednesday. That is 28 years.

Hey, you think you're dealing with kids? I am a trained mathematician. And more than that, one of the problems I have had a particular interest in is modular math and the calendar. You are dealing with one of the few people who can look at any date A.D.

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and figure out in his head what day of the week it falls on. Ask any of my friends who I have bored to death with this talent. I know whereof I speak.

4. I have received the following odd missive from Glenn Kapetansky. Make of it what you will. I think there may be mathematical or philosophical implications.

You made me laugh out loud on this one, two lines
before your punchline: "the poorest dirt road in

Mississippi or the sidewalks of New York, those great white ways are what made America great...

I wondered: do you get paved sidewalks along dirt roads? Then: weren't the "Great White Ways" the subject of violence and protests all through the 60's in Mississippi? Then I realized I was doing a "Mark Leeper"-type critique of a Mark Leeper article ... My realization itself was something you could appreciate ... Suddenly, I had one of those "infinite mirrors" sequences of self-replicating Mark Leepers filling my brain!

So I kicked all of you out. Possibly you got a kick out of it too.

5. I am looking to borrow the January 1993 A_n_a_l_o_g (my library's copy has disappeared). If anyone can lend it to me for a couple of days so I can read the new Turtledove alternate history, I would appreciate it. [-ecl]

6. Now that the inauguration is over, it's probably safe to reveal that one of our Club members actually went to high school with Hillary Clinton! How about it, Frank--how was the big do in DC? [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
MT 3D-441 908-957-5619
...mtgzfs3!leeper

Randomness scares people. Religion is a way to explain randomness.

-- Fran Lebowitz

DEUS X by Norman Spinrad
Bantam Spectra, 1993, ISBN 0-553-29677-9, \$3.99.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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[This is the first of three reviews running in this issue having to do with religious science fiction. The other two are THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB and LIVE FROM GOLGOTHA, and the three reviews should be read as a unit.]

Good things come in small packages, they say, and this novella (it's slightly under 40,000 words) fulfills that concept. There's more to chew on here than in a half-dozen bloated space weaponry novels.

Spinrad is tackling much the same question as Camus and others: the dilemma of existence. What is our purpose? Does it depend on the existence of God, or is this purpose within humanity and/or the individual? In D_e_u_s_X, the earth has been so polluted that it's considered hopeless (shades of Camus's P_l_a_g_u_e here?). One possible escape is to download yourself into the Big Board, the worldwide electronic network. But are you downloading your soul or just a simulacrum? Father De Leone thinks it is the latter, and your "clone" is nothing more than (as he puts it) "a satanic golem." (That the latter phrase is clearly a mixed metaphor is worth noting!) because he does so believe, the Pope wants him to agree to be downloaded and to report back from the other side. But somewhere along the line things go awry and take a very different turn from what everyone expected.

Spinrad does make a couple of slips. He seems to have bought into the common misconception of what papal infallibility means. (It does not mean that everything the Pope says is infallible, but that in matters of morals and faith the Pope is infallible when speaking as the "vicar of Christ." I believe there have been only three such occasions since the doctrine was put forth in 1870.) And he uses Gibson's simile of "a television receiver tuned to an empty channel" in a rather obvious fashion. But these are scarcely major flaws--the infallibility is not a necessary under-pinning of the plot by any means.

I h_i_g_h_l_y recommend this book. I even checked the exact classification (novel versus novella) so I would know exactly which category to nominate it in for a Hugo next year.

THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB by Thomas F. Monteleone
Tor, 1992, ISBN 0-312-85031-X, \$21.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
Copyright 1993 Evelyn C. Leeper

[This is the second of three reviews running in this issue having to do with religious science fiction. The other two are DEUS X and LIVE FROM GOLGOTHA, and the three reviews should be read as a unit.]

Unlike the other two "Christian religious fantasy" books I am reviewing here, this was a real disappointment. The premise sounded promising: a scientist is hired by the Vatican to clone Jesus from the blood on the Shroud of Turin. (Yes, I know it's been shown to be only six hundred years old--Monteleone has an explanation.) The child grows up, unaware of his identity until one day he is attacked by a mugger raises his hands to defend himself--and zaps his attacker into a pile of ash with a lightning bolt from his hands. Jesus-2--or as he knows himself, a priest named Peter Carezza--reports this to his superior, who informs Rome. Peter is called to Rome and discovers the secret of his identity.

Unfortunately, to pad out his story, Monteleone throws in sadistic criminals hired by the Vatican, television evangelists who are secretly living lives of luxury and debauchery (talk about stereotypes!), and a variety of other low-lives. The result is some overly graphic descriptions of torture and of sex which (in my opinion) were not necessary. It is satisfying to see Jesus-2 take on the televangelists on a television talk show. And it is nice to find out that Robert Burns was right many times over. But there was a lot more that could have been done. (The obvious omission that comes to mind is the whole question of nature-versus-nurture, which may be too scientific an approach for what Monteleone, but certainly occurred to me as something worth developing in this story.) On the whole the book didn't deliver on its promise and was ultimately disappointing.

LIVE FROM GOLGOTHA by Gore Vidal
Random House, 1992, ISBN 0-679-41611-0, \$22.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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[This is the third of three reviews running in this issue having to do with religious science fiction. The other two are DEUS X and THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB, and the three reviews should be read as a unit.]

Coincidentally, both this and _ T_ h_ e_ B_ l_ o_ o_ d_ o_ f_ t_ h_ e_ L_ a_ m_ b (which I was thinking of as "the two Jesus books I was waiting for") arrived at the library on the same day. Actually, with _ D_ e_ u_ s_ X, which I am also reviewing in conjunction with this, they make an interesting trilogy. _ D_ e_ u_ s_ X is about the Father, _ T_ h_ e_ B_ l_ o_ o_ d_ o_ f_ t_ h_ e _ L_ a_ m_ b is about the Son, and this is about the Holy Ghost.

Well, _ a ghost anyway. To be precise, a hologram from the late 1990s appears to (Saint) Timothy in the First century and tells him of his mission. A computer hacker in the 1990s is destroying the texts of the Gospels and, using the same time-travel technology the hologram is using, is destroying the originals so that even hard-copy texts aren't preserved. To preserve Christianity, Timothy must write a gospel and conceal it so it will survive, hidden from the

hacker's eyes, to be discovered in the 1990s and renew the Christian religion. And in his spare time, could Timothy go back in time and host the coverage of the Crucifixion for the television networks?

The book is designed as a social and spiritual commentary rather than as hard science fiction, so perhaps it is needlessly picky to observe that the time travels aspects of _ L _ i _ v _ e _ f _ r _ o _ m

_ G _ o _ l _ g _ o _ t _ h _ a

are not always consistent or rational: surely if the hacker can go back in time to erase Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, he can do the same to Timothy when that book appears. And why do the various travelers recruiting Timothy remember the other gospels if the hacker _ i _ s erasing them from their very beginnings? But in his "modernized" re-telling of the early days of Christianity, Vidal lets the barbs fly. What really got the Romans upset was Jesus taking over the money-changers in the Temple and lowering the prime rate. Jesus's brother James is trying to set up a rival religion from Paul--who never actually met Jesus but preaches a heck of a sermon and tap dances at the same time. (His other activities are even more outrageous.) Unabashedly irreverent, _ L _ i _ v _ e _ f _ r _ o _ m

_ G _ o _ l _ g _ o _ t _ h _ a

is not for everyone (Vidal seems to be at times taking _ T _ h _ e _ S _ a _ t _ a _ n _ i _ c _ V _ e _ r _ s _ e _ s for inspiration, and there will undoubtedly be those who take offense), but I'm nominating this for the Hugo.

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LORENZO'S OIL
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: How did two parents with no medical background find a cure for the previously terminal disease that afflicted their son? You actually will understand, step by step in this true story part intellectual puzzle, part political statement about the medical community, part story of a family medical tragedy. We need more films like this. Rating: +3 (-4 to +4).

A friend heard I was going to see L_o_r_e_n_z_o'_s_O_i_l and said we should be sure to take handkerchiefs. He had seen one L_o_r_e_n_z_o'_s_O_i_l. My wife saw the film as a political tract against the medical establishment. She saw a different L_o_r_e_n_z_o'_s_O_i_l. The film I saw was neither of those two movies. I saw a film that was the logical successor to T_h_e_S_t_o_r_y_o_f_L_o_u_i_s_P_a_s_t_e_u_r and particularly D_r._E_h_r_l_i_c'h's_M_a_g_i_c_B_u_l_l_e_t. It is the story of people who start with a scientific puzzle that is also a tragic problem. And step by step, with the tragedy eating at them, they solve the problem. And though it is about a complex medical problem, the solution process is always comprehensible, so much so that at one point I found myself whispering to my wife the solution to a piece of the puzzle that the characters had not yet figured out. Here I am learning about a disease I'd never heard of when I saw down and I wanted to shout a medical hypothesis at the screen. (I was right, too, except what I called a "constructor" they called an "enzyme.") Anyway, that is the film I saw and I had a great time!

This is a true story as enthralling as any from Paul de Kruif's M_i_c_r_o_b_e_H_u_n_t_e_r_s or Berton Roueche's accounts of medical detective work. Augusto Odone (played by Nick Nolte) and his wife Michaela (played by Susan Sarandon) are perplexed when their five-year-old son Lorenzo (played by Zack O'Malley Greenburg) starts throwing fits of anger and losing his coordination. Eventually the boy is diagnosed as having an invariably fatal disease, adrenoleukodystrophy (ALD). Because the disease is so rare, the medical community had funding for only limited research. Less effort seemed to be expended in research than in helping parents cope with the medical crisis. So Augusto and Michaela, neither with a medical background, set out to do their own research and, remarkably, found their own cure. (Not really a unique story, however. When the nuclear physicist Leo Szilard developed a terminal case of bladder cancer, he turned his attention from physics to medicine and discovered his own cure. This was a case of "physicist, heal thyself." Of course, Odone was not even a scientist. He was a banker.)

Susan Sarandon does a very good job of conveying the anxiety of a mother trying desperately to save her child and coping with a senseless guilt because genetically ALD is passed by the mother. Nick Nolte has problems with the Italian accent, but otherwise is quite good. Peter Ustinov is, as always, a pleasure to watch, in a role not quite fair to the medical community. George Miller, best know for the "Mad Max" films, directed and co-wrote the screenplay. As a physician himself, he can explain the medical aspects in nice, clear, simple terms. His direction is, however, a bit heavy on religious imagery and in gratuitous overhead shots.

This is a film written for an intelligent audience, and intelligent audiences should find it very rewarding. My rating is +3 on the -4 to +4 scale.

