

here's a question I would be willing (and eager) to accept speculation on: In ST4 (Whales, etc.), why the hell didn't they just use their magic universal translator to interpret the probe's probing? ... I'm a linguistics grad student, by the by, and this silly device disgusts me as surely as faster-than-light-travel

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makes most physicists apoplectic..."

Well, LI.BOHRER@A20.CC.UTEXAS.EDU, let me recommend the book that has been selected for discussion at the April 1 meeting of the Lincroft branch of the Science Fiction Club, at noon in LZ 1L-205: THE HAND IS QUICKER by Alice Antspracher. THIQ recounts the adventures of a lone astronaut who lands on a planet of a distant star and literally stumbles across an alien society. Literally. The society is composed of intelligent ants, and the astronaut has stumbled on an ant hill.

It takes him a while, of course, to realize that the extraterrestrial ants are, in fact, highly intelligent. When he does, he faces the challenge of establishing communication with them, as a prelude to mutually advantageous commercial interchange.

Unlike many s-f authors, Antspracher declines to take the easy way out and simply provide a universal translator chip. Nor does she take the second most common tack and have the astronaut, starting with sign language, teach the ETs English. Instead, with realistic backtracking and confusion, *he* laboriously learns *their* language.

The reader soon comes to empathize with the hero's struggle to communicate, as we too, bit by bit, learn the ants' language. Indeed, this learning experience turns out to be an absolutely essential component of the novel, because the last two-thirds of the book is written entirely in ant language.

It's a bravura tour de force. As one reviewer put it, "Once you pick up this book, you can hardly keep from putting it down."

If you've already read THE HAND IS QUICKER, bring your copy to the April 1 meeting and swap it for another equally distinctive tome.

Even if you haven't read it, bring some books to swap.

2. After the item in last week's notice in which Evelyn said for the current film festival we have a dog people have been asking us about "our dog." In fact, last week's film fest was a once in a lifetime opportunity to meet Famous Seamus, the Wonder Dog. As of Sunday he will go back to his true owners whose names also happen to be Leeper, but in this case David and Susan. Seamus is the neurotic canine who is afraid of his food and water dishes, made famous to millions by my review of the film THE STUFF. Those of you who may be allergic to dogs will find all future film fests hypo-allergenic.

3. This is a confession that you are reading the words of an outlaw. Let me tell you how my life of crime began.

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Back when I lived in Detroit I was amazed at how many people seemed to confuse the concepts of "news" and "local news." The local newspaper would have front-page items in the following priorities: 1) The feature picture, often a woman in a skimpy outfit enjoying the all-too-rare nice weather. 2) Auto industry news (Gerald Ford was President but when the headline said "Ford says..." they meant Henry.) 3) Detroit area news. 4) Michigan news. 5) (And now we are getting to the back pages in among the used car ads) National news. 6) And in last place was international news, if they didn't get their quota of car ads.

Well, I have to say that after the first item I would put the rest in just about reverse order of priority. So I kind of got in the habit of getting my news from National Public Radio. One problem with that is that when NPR starts covering your local news you know you got trouble. So now I know more about what is happening in the Strait of Hormuz than what is happening in New Jersey. Well, what seems to be happening is there are suddenly a bunch of signs on the road that say "Drug-Free School Zone." Now this bothers me because I have a bottle of Anacin in my glove compartment. (Uh, that's not a testimonial--the grocery didn't carry any generic cheap aspirin.) So my life of crime has begun that first morning when I drove my

bottle of Anacins past a school. Now I am starting to wonder if the drug-free school zone signs are backed up by law. Is there a fixed distance from the school I am allowed to carry legally my Anacins. I have looked very hard and cannot find any sign that says something like "Resume Drugs." I think if I get arrested for my Anacins, my defense will be that the state should better mark off the zone. I suspect, however, the judge will just say no.

(Speaking of lawbreakers, this issue is dedicated to an outlaw out there. On Routes 9 and 35 in Sayreville there is a giant garish billboard advertising a furrier. It features this woman who looks like a zombie wearing the hides of at least a dozen animals. Somebody keeps throwing red paint balloons at the fur to remind passersby of the essential difference between fur and cloth. I have no idea who is doing it, but, "Right on!")

4. The Film Forum has sent out their summer schedule and the films of interest to science fiction fans are as follows:

Friday/Saturday, April 15/16

DR. JEKYLL & MR. HYDE (1932--restored version)

(Fri 6:25, 9:40; Sat 3:25, 6:40, 10:00)

THE MASK OF FU MANCHU (Fri 5:00, 8:15; Sat 2:00, 5:15, 8:35)

Wednesday/Thursday, April 27/28

THE SACRIFICE (4:00, 6:40, 9:20)

Friday/Saturday/Sunday, April 29/30/May 1

STALKER (Fri 6:00, 9:00; Sat/Sun 3:00, 6:00, 9:00)

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Thursday, June 2

KNIFE IN THE WATER (6:00, 9:45)

DIABOLIQUE (4:00, 7:45)

Friday/Saturday, June 2/3

THE SEVENTH SEAL (Fri 5:10, 9:00; Sat 1:20, 5:10, 9:00)

SMILES OF A SUMER NIGHT (Fri 7:00, 10:50; Sat 3:10, 7:00, 10:50)

Monday, June 6

METROPOLIS (4:00, 7:00, 10:15)

(7:00 performance has live organ accompaniment)
THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI/UN CHIEN ANDALOU (5:40, 8:40)

Sunday, June 12

THE THREE PENNY OPERA (1:00, 5:15, 9:00)
M (3:10, 7:25)

Friday/Saturday, June 17/18

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST (Fri 4:30, 7:50, 11:05; Sat 1:10, 4:30, 7:50, 11:05)
ORPHEUS (Fri 6:10, 9:30; Sat 2:50, 6:10, 9:30)

Monday, June 20

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA (1925) (5:45, 9:00)
(5:45 performance has live organ accompaniment)
THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME (1923) (4:00, 7:15, 10:30)

All shows are at the Film Forum, 57 Watts Street, New York, and cost \$5. Call 212-431-1590 for further information.

5. And to all you who celebrate it, Happy Apfoda! [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
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...mtgzz!leeper

INTO THE WOODS

A theater review by Mark R. Leeper

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The very idea of making a great Broadway musical out of the old penny-dreadful story of Sweeney Todd seems absurd. But Stephen Sondheim proved his immense talent with S_w_e_e_n_e_y_T_o_d_d, t_h_e_D_e_m_o_n_B_a_r_b_e_r_o_f_F_l_e_e_t_S_t_r_e_e_t. The idea of making a great Broadway musical out of G_r_i_m_m_s'_F_a_i_r_y_T_a_l_e_s seems absurd too. And after seeing Stephen Sondheim's I_n_t_o_t_h_e_W_o_o_d_s it seems just as absurd. For S_w_e_e_n_e_y_T_o_d_d Sondheim crafted a play of revenge and rage and passion with a musical score that expresses those emotions and yet is beautiful. For I_n_t_o_t_h_e_W_o_o_d_s he crafted a "Fractured Fairy Tale" that is momentarily amusing but shallow and forgettable. There is nothing wrong with an occasional light musical comedy from Sondheim. But with so many cotton candy plays on Broadway, I was hoping for steak.

I_n_t_o_t_h_e_W_o_o_d_s is a tying-together of several famous Grimms' fairy tales, starting with "Cinderella," "Jack and the Beanstalk," and "The Baker and His Wife." [What? You've never heard of "The Baker and His Wife"? That's because it is a famous Grimms' fairy tale invented by author James Lapine to make the rest of the play mesh.] Along the way the plot also works in Little Red Riding Hood, Rapunzel, and--in brief cameos--Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, and the Goose That Lays the Golden Eggs. All these fairy-tale people have their problems, but finally everything works out and they live happily ever after. And that is the end of Act One.

Act Two is essentially a sequel to Act One rather than the second half of a story. The characters all come back but in a different story. The second story tells you a little more about the characters but remains a different story with a distinctly different and darker tone. It is almost like a different writer and director was making I_n_t_o_t_h_e_W_o_o_d_s_I_I.

Much of Sondheim's music is reminiscent of Sondheim's less interesting themes from S_w_e_e_n_e_y_T_o_d_d. There are no themes as powerful or as grabbing as the better music from S_w_e_e_n_e_y_T_o_d_d. The play's two leads are Bernadette Peters as the witch and Joanna Gleason as the Baker's Wife. they seem to act reasonably well together in spite of the fact that the lesser-known Gleason is roughly 8.6 times the actress Peters is and runs away with the show. Such a light play is not so hard for Gleason to run away with, but if she didn't do it the play would just lie there. I_n_t_o_t_h_e_W_o_o_d_s is mediocre stuff.

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FICCIONES by Jorge Luis Borges
Grove Press, 1962 (c1956), 0-394-17244-2, \$6.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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The seventeen works included in this collection are some of the best Sherlockian stories produced in the last thirty years. Borges has managed to re-create the spirit of many of Doyle's works while transforming the plots rather than merely repeating them. "Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote," for example, is a study of compulsive behavior with its roots in the butler's behavior in "The Musgrave Ritual." (Those who compare it to "The Creeping Man" are confusing involuntary possession with directed compulsion.) "The Circular Ruins" elaborates on the dream state that so many Canonical stories touched upon in their use of the dying gasps and ravings of murder victims.

Many of the Canonical characters are used in these stories. Moriarty, that Napoleon of crime, is revealed as the mastermind behind the infamous "Babylon Lottery." And certainly Jabez Wilson, with his incessant copying in "The Red-headed League," is one of the major contributors to the "Library of Babel." The hand of Von Bork can be seen as the force behind the need for the enigmatic message of "The Garden of Forking Paths," which Holmes must decipher in order to save the British Empire. This message is less like that of "The Dancing Men" or even "The Red Circle" than that of "A Study in Scarlet"--the word is all-important, not some mathematical cipher.

Of all the stories in this volume, "Death and the Compass" gives Holmes his best opportunity to display his deductive powers. Given three murders, can he deduce the location of the fourth and hence prevent it? He does so, of course, but this is all the more amazing in light of the fact that his reasoning is mathematically faulty--his logic would yield, not one possible location, but three! Is it possible that Holmes, dissatisfied with the choice provided by the unambiguous Spanish "compas" (meaning the drawing instrument--the stories _ w _ e _ r _ e originally written in Spanish), translated it into the ambiguous English "compass" and the _ b _ a _ c _ k into the unambiguous--and more useful--"brujula" (meaning the direction finder)? Watson has told us that Holmes's knowledge of mathematics was nil, so it makes sense that he would take a different tack. And it's this, not "The Garden of Forking Paths," that harkens back to "The Red Circle," a story in which Holmes realizes that the message given is meaningless in the Italian alphabet, and so translates the letter sequence into the English alphabet while leaving the words in Italian.

There are some who claim that the lack of any actual appearance by Holmes or Watson in these stories is a flaw that must be taken into account when judging their worth as Holmesian pastiches. But that is the genius of Borges--his ability to "suggest" Holmes without having to

do anything so blunt as describe him, quote him, or even mention him is the mark of a true artist. August Derleth tried, but was forced to introduce a Holmes stand-in, Solar Pons. Borges has no such copies, and because of this, his pastiches are worthy of the highest admiration.

