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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
 Club Notice - 6/24/88 -- Vol. 6, No. 52

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are on Wednesdays at noon.
 LZ meetings are in LZ 3A-206; MT meetings are in the cafeteria.

 D A T E T O P I C

- 07/06 LZ: Bookswap
- 07/27 LZ: SEVENTH SON by Orson Scott Card (Hugo nominee)
- 08/17 LZ: THE URTH OF THE NEW SUN by Gene Wolfe (Hugo nominee)
- 09/07 LZ: THE FORGE OF GOD by Greg Bear (Hugo nominee)
- 09/28 LZ: WHEN GRAVITY FAILS by George Alec Effinger (Hugo nominee)
- 10/19 LZ: TO SAIL BEYOND THE SUNSET by Robert Heinlein
(A Heinlein retrospective)

 D A T E E X T E R N A L M E E T I N G S / C O N V E N T I O N S / E T C.

- 07/09 Science Fiction Association of Bergen County: E. T. Steadman
(phone 201-933-2724 for details)
- 07/15 BARBECON. Wawayanda State Park, NJ. NJ Science Fiction Society
-07/17 picnic & camp-out. Info: NJSFS, POB 65, Paramus, NJ 07653;
201-432-5965.
- 07/22 UNICON. Holiday Inn, Annapolis, MD. GoH: Vernor Vinge. Info:
-07/24 UniCon, Box 7553, Silver Spring, MD 20907.
- 09/01 NOLACON II (46th World Science Fiction Convention), New Orleans.
-09/05 GoH: Donald A. Wollheim; FGoH: Roger Sims; TM: Mike Resnick.
Info: Nolacon II, 921 Canal St., Suite 831, New Orleans LA
70112 (504) 525-6008.

HO Chair: John Jetzt HO 1E-525 834-1563 mtuxo!jetzt
 LZ Chair: Rob Mitchell LZ 1B-306 576-6106 mtuxo!jrtr
 MT Chair: Mark Leeper MT 3E-433 957-5619 mtgzz!leeper
 HO Librarian: Tim Schroeder HO 3M-420 949-5866 homxb!tps
 LZ Librarian: Lance Larsen LZ 3L-312 576-6142 lzfme!lfl
 MT Librarian: Will Harmon MT 3C-406 957-5128 mtgzz!wch
 Factotum: Evelyn Leeper MT 1F-329 957-2070 mtgzy!ecl
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1. I don't know if you heard about it but the tobacco industry had a sort of victory last week. At least they claimed it as a victory. As I understand it, a New Jersey cable splicer was suing Liggett and Meyers because his wife died of cancer from smoking

THE MT VOID

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their cigarettes. The plaintiff proved that the cigarette company knew that there was a highly likely health hazard connected with cigarettes, but the defense claimed that much of the responsibility lay with the dead woman, who should have known that cigarettes are dangerous in spite of the cigarette industry's efforts to tell her otherwise.

Now think about that. The tobacco people are saying, "Sure we have lied for years about the dangers of smoking, but it's our customer's responsibility to realize we're a pack of liars. Haven't they been reading the news?" I mean, this is the kind of argument that is going to give their most loyal customers a real warm feeling, isn't it? This is a new concept in American jurisprudence: innocent by reason of being too obviously guilty.

In the long run I think this will have a good effect on the legal system. The word will get around among would-be litigants that if you sue someone they can just say, "Hey, man, you knew I was a crook." If you got a good lawyer he might prove you didn't know the defendant was dishonest, but then the lawyer will pocket any award you got, saying, "Hey, man, you knew I was a lawyer."

2. Again, there will be no film festival this week. Mark has to work and he doesn't trust me to run a proper film festival. Just because the last time I ran one we needed to fumigate the house is no excuse! [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
MT 3E-433 957-5619
...mtgzz!leeper

BULL DURHAM

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Copyright 1988 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: Comedy-drama about a minor league baseball team and a love triangle involving two players.

The major characters are fleshed out well, but it would have been better to see more of some of the others.

Rating: +1.

B_u_l_l_D_u_r_h_a_m is a kind of comedy we don't see much of any more.

There are a lot of comedies being made now, but most seem to be of a

formula. Take one or more comics established by being on S_a_t_u_r_d_a_y_N_i_g_h_t

L_i_v_e,_S_e_c_o_n_d_C_i_t_y, etc., and add a script full of jokes you would have

to be blind a_n_d deaf to miss--by definition subtlety means someone might

miss a gag. The comedies you get then are films like the horribly

unfunny S_p_i_e_s_L_i_k_e_U_s,_D_r_a_g_n_e_t, and D_r._D_e_t_r_o_i_t. B_u_l_l_D_u_r_h_a_m is

more

like the comedies they made most of the time in the 1940s and 1950s.

What humor it has is derived from the interaction of believable

personalities in believable situations. The only thing keeping B_u_l_l
D_u_r_h_a_m from being a throwback to the subtler comedies of the 1940s is
several fairly explicit sex scenes.

B_u_l_l_D_u_r_h_a_m tells the story of one season in the life of a minor
league ball team, the Durham Bulls. The team has, among others, a
pitcher, Nuke Laloosh (played by Tim Robbins), who has a hundred-
horsepower pitching arm and a nine-volt brain; a catcher, Crash Davis
(well-played by Kevin Costner); and two groupies. One groupie is the
owner's daughter (played by Jenny Robertson) and the other, Annie Savoy
(played by Susan Sarandon), is an odd fan who has turned baseball into a
sort of religion and has sort of become a team institution. Crash has
been hired not just to catch, but also to keep Nuke out of trouble as
the big, dumb super-pitcher is groomed for the majors. His job is
complicated by the attentions of Ms. Savoy, who is indecisive whether it
is the pitcher or the catcher she wants to sleep with.

B_u_l_l_D_u_r_h_a_m gives us some tantalizing views of the characters of
the team members and especially the managers, but unfortunately these
characters are never filled out. Most of the story deals with
Sarandon's character who--for someone with no more status with the team
than "fan"--is never far from the action. Some of the action she
generates herself by tying ball players to beds and reading to them
poetry by Blake and Whitman. And though Costner's character is a bit
stereotypical--the embittered veteran player--he plays the role well.
With a rating of +1 on the -4 to +4 scale, it brings to four the number
of sports films I have liked. (T_h_e_N_a_t_u_r_a_l got a +3 from me, and I_t
H_a_p_p_e_n_s_E_v_e_r_y_S_p_r_i_n_g and H_o_o_s_i_e_r_s got +1s.)

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A Suitcase of Travel Books
Book reviews by Evelyn C. Leeper
Copyright 1988 Evelyn C. Leeper

Traveling--if I could do it all the time I would. Unfortunately, my company thinks I should work forty-nine weeks for three weeks vacation rather than the other way around. (I mean, how unreasonable can you get?) So I do the next best thing when I can't travel--I read travel books. And just as my traveling is to the more unusual destinations, so are the books I read more about the Niger than about Nice, more about Machu Picchu than Madrid.

Reading these books is a two-edged sword. On the one hand, they make me eager to travel. On the other, they point up the wide range of travel styles that I am missing out on. No one has written a really great travelogue about a 15-day guided tour of Europe or even China. All these authors have set out pretty much on their own and hitchhiked across China, or discovered ancient Mayan ruins, or lived for a year with Inuits in Greenland. Somehow my travel diaries of my day at Chichen Itza or staying in a hotel in London just don't live up to this. (I also have yet to master the talent of remembering every conversation verbatim--let alone every conversation in a foreign language.)

Anyway, here's a quick overview of what I've read lately, dedicated to Lawrence Watt-Evans....

FROM HEAVEN LAKE by Vikram Seth, Vintage, 1987, 0-394-75218-X, \$5.95:

Vikram Seth became a well-known author in the United States with his "novel in verse" G_o_l_d_e_n_G_a_t_e. F_r_o_m_H_e_a_v_e_n_L_a_k_e was published four years earlier in Great Britain, but is only now becoming available here. This is unfortunate, because this means that the Sinkiang and Tibet that Seth was writing about no longer exist. The rate of change in China has been unbelievable over the past five years and the recent turmoil in Tibet only emphasizes how quickly that culture is being eroded. So if F_r_o_m_H_e_a_v_e_n_L_a_k_e makes you want to travel to the same places as Seth--it's too late.

And it did make me want to go there. Seth is equally good at describing the scenery so that you can see it and at conveying the personalities of the people he met. And because he is a traveler rather than a tourist, he concentrates on the everyday life rather than on the tourist sites. What difficulties he encounters he takes in his stride, rather than trying either to gloss them over or to magnify their importance. Highly recommended.

ACROSS CHINA by Peter Jenkins, Fawcett, 1988 (1986c), 0-449-21456-7, \$4.95: In F_r_o_m_H_e_a_v_e_n_L_a_k_e, Vikram Seth was a student just trying to

get home; here Jenkins seems to be an aging hippie living on a farm who just happens to get invited to travel to Tibet to write the story of an expedition to climb Chomolungma (a.k.a. Mt. Everest). he also just happens to know someone from China who was willing to go back and travel through China with him as his interpreter.

If this happened in a movie, the critics would label it as totally contrived and unbelievable.

Now, I'm not saying this book is a fabrication--I'm sure it isn't. But it's so far from any experience that I could have that I couldn't really get drawn into it. (All right, so I'll probably never hitchhike through China like Seth either. But that is within my control; being invited to accompany a mountain-climbing expedition is not.) The one aspect of A_c_r_o_s_s_C_h_i_n_a that I could identify with was Jenkins' new-found appreciation for the freedoms in the United States that don't exist in China. His reaction to the contrast between China and Hong Kong was very similar to mine--though I did not immediately head for a McDonald's as soon as I got to Hong Kong. (After our first trip to England, though, Mark did insist on stopping at a McDonald's on the way home from the airport. The British do many things well, but hamburgers are not among them.)

Overall, this book was a disappointment to me. Someone into mountain climbing might find the descriptions of the expedition more interesting. (Along those lines I would also recommend the article on climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro in the March 1988 issue of T_r_a_v_e_l_e_r magazine.)

VIDEO NIGHT IN KATHMANDU by Pico Iyer, Knopf, 1988, 0-394-55027-7, \$19.95: Pico Iyer is a reporter who traveled through Asia looking, not for the mysteries of the Orient, but for the invasion of the Occident. Yes, baseball has become the Japanese national sport, and yes, Bangkok is full of bars and "massage parlors" for people looking for something more direct than Tantric temple carvings. But Iyer doesn't view the adoption of Western customs as inherently evil. He is less than enthralled with the brothels of Bangkok, but he does perceive some benefit in them, perhaps because they have not slavishly copied the West, but have added a Thai element as well. Japanese baseball is

copied from American baseball, but is still recognizably Japanese: in how the fans act, in how the team trains, in the much heavier emphasis on team and less on the superstar. Rambo may have reached Kathmandu, but he is a Rambo perceived through Nepalese eyes.

Iyer does not say (as John Krich seems to in M_u_s_i_c_i_n_E_v_e_r_y_R_o_o_m) that all that is Western is evil and all that is Asian is good. Neither does he say (as many tourists do) that all that is Western is good and all that is Asian is outdated; that would be just as blind. Yes, Bali is no longer the isolated tropical paradise that the travel brochures would have you believe. (If it were, who would be there to write the brochures?) But it is unreasonable of Western tourists to expect Asia

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to remain "quaint" for their benefit, as some sort of continent-sized Disneyland where one takes the China ride and the Burma ride and the Japan ride.... When I was in China, many of the people in our group wanted to see only the old China--the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, the Temple of Heaven. A silk factory or a jade-carving factory were okay (since they could buy things there), but they were very impatient when being taken to a tea commune or a middle school or a hospital. These were "propaganda" and we had paid so much for the tour, why should we be dragged to these places? But these are as much part of China as the Great Wall--more so, since most Chinese today have not seen the Great Wall, nor will they have a chance to. How would we feel if visitors to this country wanted to see only Amerind museums, restorations of colonial towns, and Civil War battlefields? Or if they said, "What is there to see in New York that we don't have better back in <fill in your country>? We want to see cowboys and Indians!"

So Iyer examines the Westernization of Asia from a more neutral perspective than most. And, though he doesn't mention it, there is the balancing trend of the Asianization of the West. Now there's a topic for a companion volume! Is the United States being taken over by Chinese restaurants and sushi bars? Is the sheer volume of the Indian film industry going to swamp Hollywood? Or is the Japanese video industry going to wipe it out first? (Come to think of it, is "video night in Kathmandu" an entirely Western invasion, or are the Japanese somehow just as involved?) Are we heading toward Wilkie's "One World" in a way he never envisioned?

MUSIC IN EVERY ROOM by John Krich, Atlantic Monthly Press, 1988, 0-87113-194-3, \$7.95: Subtitled "Around the World in a Bad Mood," this

book claimed to depict "the disappointments and corruptions of modern travel." In many ways this approach is similar to Pico Iyar's

_ N_ i_ g_ h_ t_ i_ n_ K_ a_ t_ h_ m_ a_ n_ d_ u, but where Iyar sees the Westernization of Asia as a

natural trend, Krich sees only the negative side. This isn't surprising, as his trip seems aimed at discovering the mystical side of Asia rather than a modern society. His traveling seems to be from one disillusionment to the next. If some authors sugarcoat the reality of travel, Krich dips it in gall. He is too aware of the hawkers and the gawkers wherever he goes to say anything about what draws people to these places. The Ganges is a mere backdrop to sari sellers and others whose main goal seems to be to separate the tourist from his money. Is this any more admirable than the sort of tourist--much scorned and reviled by Krich--who sees the Ganges only as a backdrop for his photographs?

Krich's sections are titled "Near Escape," "Near China," "Near Vietnam," "near Nirvana," "Near East," and "Near Home." And how accurate--Krich gets near his destinations but never seems to make contact with them. This is probably the perfect travel book for the sort of person described in Anne Tyler's

_ A_ c_ c_ i_ d_ e_ n_ t_ a_ l_ T_ o_ u_ r_ i_ s_ t; it

will reinforce one's desire to stay home and to avoid travel at all costs.

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For those who enjoy traveling, Krich may be more annoying. And the last few chapters of the book are such that one ends up questioning what the rest of the book is trying to say.

INCIDENTS OF TRAVEL IN YUCATAN by John L. Stephens (in two volumes), Dover, originally published 1843, 0-486-20926-1 and 0-486-20927-X, \$4.95

each: This is one of the two old travel books I've read recently (the

other being Charles Darwin's _ V_ o_ y_ a_ g_ e_ o_ f_ t_ h_ e_ B_ e_ a_ g_ l_ e), yet it seems as if

it could have been written last year. The sequel to his _ I_ n_ c_ i_ d_ e_ n_ t_ s_ o_ f

_ T_ r_ a_ v_ e_ l_ i_ n_ C_ e_ n_ t_ r_ a_ l_ A_ m_ e_ r_ i_ c_ a, _ C_ h_ i_ a_ p_ a_ s, _ a_ n_ d_ Y_ u_ c_ a_ t_ a_ n, this book chronicles

Stephens' return to Yucatan to seek out Mayan ruins. He has the usual set of traveler's problems (he's sick a lot, for example), but also some more unusual ones, like the state of political unrest that existed in Yucatan at that time. True, travelers today can still have that sort of problem, but with modern communications today's traveler has a better chance of knowing what to expect when s/he arrives somewhere.

Stephens begins his searches from Merida and travels extensively in that area. His descriptions of the ruins are quite detailed and have proved extremely valuable to later investigators. In this regard, Stephens errs in his prediction that these ruins would crumble and be forgotten in a hundred years. While this is undoubtedly true of some of the ruins he encountered, many of them have been preserved or even restored and attract thousands of visitors a year. This is true not just of Chichen Itza and Tulum, the best known of the sites, but also of lesser sites such as Uxmal and Kabah. If one compares Stephens' diagrams and drawings with photographs taken at the sites today, one can see the accuracy of detail that he demanded.

Though Stephens spends a lot of time describing the ruins, he also describes in great detail the living conditions and daily life of the people of that area. He also spends several pages refuting the "ancient astronauts" theory. Of course, it was not traveling under that name at the time he wrote, but there were those who insisted that the ruins could not have been built by the ancestors of the current inhabitants and must have been constructed by some lost race, or by Egyptians who crossed the Atlantic, or even by the Spanish. Stephens explains why these theories do not match his findings and says that, no matter how "degraded" the state (as he describes it) the Indians live in in his times, these natives were indeed the descendents of the builders of these cities.

I have not read I_n_c_i_d_e_n_t_s_o_f_T_r_a_v_e_l_i_n
C_e_n_t_r_a_l_A_m_e_r_i_c_a,_C_h_i_a_p_a_s,
a_n_d_Y_u_c_a_t_a_n, but I will certainly be looking for it. If Hollywood was still making adventure movies, here would be some great material--a true story of "scientific adventure."