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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
 Club Notice - 12/8/89 -- Vol. 8, No. 23

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are on Wednesdays at noon.
 LZ meetings are in LZ 2R-158. MT meetings are in the cafeteria.

 D A T E T O P I C

12/13 LZ: "Well World" series by Jack Chalker (The Universe as a
 Mathematical Process)

 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.

- 12/16 NJSFS New Jersey Science Fiction Society: John Gregory Betancourt
 (phone 201-432-5965 for details) (Saturday)
- 12/17 Gaylaxians (Sunday) (phone 201-672-3044 for details)
- 01/13 Science Fiction Association of Bergen County: Victoria Poyser
 (book cover artist)
 (phone 201-933-2724 for details) (Saturday)

HO Chair: John Jetzt HO 1E-525 834-1563 hocpa!jetzt
 LZ Chair: Rob Mitchell LZ 1B-306 576-6106 mtuxo!jrrt
 MT Chair: Mark Leeper MT 3D-441 957-5619 mtgzx!leeper
 HO Librarian: Tim Schroeder HO 3D-225A 949-5866 homxb!tps
 LZ Librarian: Lance Larsen LZ 3L-312 576-3346 lzfme!lfl
 MT Librarian: Evelyn Leeper MT 1F-329 957-2070 mtgzy!ecl
 Factotum: Evelyn Leeper MT 1F-329 957-2070 mtgzy!ecl
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1. Frank Leisti provides the following introduction to the next
 discussion meeting in Lincroft, which will be about the "Well
 World" series by Jack Chalker:

 M i d n i g h t a t t h e W e l l o f S o u l s begins the "Well World" series. We
 find mankind in the future, having explored parts of the galaxy and
 having met with many puzzles in our universe. Mankind has space
 ships that ply the human part of the galaxy as cargo and passenger

ships. It is into this universe that we meet Nathan Brazil, a space captain who is ferrying some passengers along with his cargo. Their travels bring them past an old planet -- a planet which has an ancient artifact present on it. We discover an SOS signalling Nathan and he ventures to investigate. The passengers that he has

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provide an odd assortment of human scum. There is a girl who has been given a material called sponge. This product is quite addictive -- allowing the person control over the taker of the product. Yet, the catch is that the brain cells are slowly destroyed. The hive-like quality of a number of worlds allows a complete takeover of the Council seats and these vicious politicians are expanding their empire. The girl is living proof of the drug.

Her cry for help to Nathan, a Orthodox Jewish captain who loves pornographic books, brings them to the old world where they discover a grisly mass murder. Pursuing the trail of the murder -- they enter a plain and vanish -- only to appear at the reception area of the Well World.

Mankind had discovered that there were scattered around the galaxy, incredibly old planets -- older than the other planets in the universe. Often, these planets had very old suns or no suns at all -- simply wandering around the galaxy. Investigation of these planets indicated that some beings had built the planets with a quasi organic computer underlying the entire world. They called these beings Markovians. A scientific team was investigating one such world -- where the murders took place. We discover later in the series that Nathan Brazil is the Wandering Jew, an immortal who can not die. Indeed, he is the last of the Markovian race -- a technician who can work the miracles under the Well World. This computer that controls the Well World and the current universe has all the necessary mathematical parameters to change reality. For the people with Nathan Brazil, it offers them a second chance to life.

At the reception area of the Well World, Nathan Brazil encounters a huge walrus like creature who was an old space captain tired of living who answered a call and arrived at the Well World. This

lying person was Serge Ortega. He lies to the others and has them enter the Well World interface -- where the people's mathematical reality is altered into some other creature -- similar to our myths and legends -- fairy-like creatures, huge butterflies, beavers with intelligence, lizards, centaurs, etc. Nathan informs Serge that a murder had passed through shortly before they did and that he was there to hunt him down.

When Nathan Brazil entered the interface, the computer recognized him as a Markovian and sent him to the human section of the world. Most sections were hexagonal in design -- with some energy barrier to keep climate and conditions of the inhabitants separate. Creatures could pass through the barriers so trade was possible. When Nathan emerged, he remembered all of his existence -- everything he tried so hard to forget.

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Nathan meets the others and they venture to the wall of the Well World. The wall is fashioned at the equator and separates carbon life from non-carbon life. The North part of the Well World has the non-carbon lifeforms which we discover in the later books of the series. Finally, once Midnight at the Well of Souls occurs, Nathan and others enter the opening at the Wall. Once inside, Nathan takes on his true form as a Markovian and shows everyone what is present inside the Well World. He shows them the computer that can change reality for anyone of them and asks them what they would do.

In fear, everyone attempts to kill Nathan, yet in this place he can not die. His concern was that someone who knew the mathematics of the Well World would destroy entire civilizations without his knowledge. He grants favours to those of his group that were good and gives them a fresh start in the universe outside and punishes the mass murderer in a particularly fiendish manner.

An excellent book and a wonderful series. [-frl]

2. I think you know there are a lot of people with a lot of strange ideas out there and they would really like you to believe them.

People who believe anything they hear are going to get a very strange world-view. You have to measure any new idea with a strong degree of skepticism. Luckily, everything I tell you has been pre-skeptized so there is no real need for you to add additional skepticism. Boy, I was skeptical enough for two when I investigated the power company/rock-and-roll connection. Of course, we have all seen for years little signs that the bad music industry has been giving little plugs to power companies for years. Wasn't there a musical group called "Tower of Power"? Doesn't some New York station bill itself as "Power 95" or some such?

But more sinister are the little pushes in the other direction. Have you ever been driving along, listening to a Hayden symphony, say, and you drive under a power line? All of a sudden you are listening to rock music. Did you change the station? No. The power company has overlaid it with their own station. You think that was just a nearby station on the dial. Try to find it sometime. You can get that particular station only under power lines. That's how it gets broadcast. Somebody in the power company wants to make sure even people who like good music get a dose of the bad stuff. Some people have taken to not even listening to music in the car and they think that makes them safe. Actually a very scientific government organization (believe me, you'd know the name) has recently proven that the ionization in the air around power lines destroys your brain t_h_e_s_a_m_e_w_a_y listening to Bruce Springsteen music does. Makes you wonder, huh?

The scope of this plan is truly international. The Soviet Union is having its own problems with the rock music/power company. That

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part of the world was the home of Tchaikovsky and Borodin. Not any more. Their power companies are pulling in bad music as fast as they can. I have seen footage of the concerts. Really frightening. Here and there power plants may be resisting. But when the conspirators find a Chernobyl that cannot be bullied, they arrange for an "accident" that the whole world will see!

And do you think that it is just a coincidence that there are two slots in an electrical outlet and two speakers on a stereo. And what about the World Trade Center where

[The above has to be printed incomplete. Our correspondent was found dead in his apartment. Apparently he was taking a bath and his radio fell into the tub and electrocuted him. Curiously, the radio was set to a rock station. It's odd because he always hated rock.]

3. One of my college professors used to talk about computer science in the Soviet Union. Apparently some time in the Fifties the decision was made that digital computing was petty-bourgeois. Only analog computers were proper. This distinction was felt to be extremely important because of serious exploitation of the working classes throughout the world. People who wanted to work on the problems of developing digital computers were told that approach was not just wrong, it was immoral. Suffice it to say that introducing this piece of dogma into the discussion of a scientific issue did nothing apparent positive for the oppressed working classes, probably just the opposite. And the decision hamstrung Soviet computer science for years to come. Political dogma and inflexibility that allows no counter viewpoints does nothing positive for getting at the truth of any issue.

A few weeks ago I speculated in the notice about how a surprising number of human behaviors--positive, negative, and neutral--seem to follow a certain pattern. That pattern is that we behave as if we are, without realizing it, programmed to try to create as many copies of our genes as possible. We have gotten precisely one piece of mail objecting to the speculation. The following is from Paul Chisholm.

Mark,

Congratulations. You have advanced from mildly entertaining to actively offensive (not to mention ignorant) in less than a paragraph.

In the latest (11/13?) issue of the MT VOID, you write:

While we are on unpleasant subjects, I will mention in passing that it [is] the mind too weak to overrule the urgings of these beaties that turns to rape. Why the genes urge some people to rape should be obvious at this

point. These little beasties have a bigger fixation making copies than the sixth person in line for a Xerox machine.

I assume that you're suggesting that rapists assault their victims for the purpose of carrying on their genes. Wrong. Rape is not a sexual crime. It's a brutal form of assault, a violent attack on a victim who is made to feel completely helpless. If you look into rapists' motivations, they don't talk about sex, let alone reproduction. They're trying to inflict pain. They succeed.

By implying that the intent of rape is a (relatively innocent) desire to procreate, you've trivialized the trauma of everyone who's ever been the victim of such an assault. I think they call it, "adding insult to injury".

Any chance we're going to see an open apology?

While I didn't want this to turn into a whole discussion, I think I should respond. I guess I find it disturbing that in a subject of this importance and in a subject as little understood as the psychological motivations for a crime like rape anyone can take on the authoritative air to label a disagreeing explanation "Wrong." and to label the person holding such a view "ignorant."

Let me summarize my reading of Paul's mail. He is saying, "How dare Mark say that genetic advantage is a cause of rape. It is well-known that sadism is the cause of rape, so there is not point in theorizing further about the causes. Rape can be very bad, so Mark should apologize to rape victims for speculating about any cause but the one I accept." Notice he specifically rules out instinct to reproduce genes as being a possible cause.

I have nothing but contempt for the rapist and for the crime of rape but I cannot believe that a discussion of the causes of the crime does a disservice to the victims. I think I have as much or perhaps more reason to be indignant about the crime as Paul does. But I am not satisfied as Paul is that he has the full answer about why the crime exists.

Rape is one of many brutal crimes that really are "brutal"--that is like behavior of animals. Rape is, in fact, common among many species. I do not think we can understand the crime by explaining the behavior only in humans or by saying it has one root cause in humans and another in all other species. Rape is, for example, very common in aquatic fowl. I am unsure what is going on in a bird's mind during the act, but I find it less convincing that its mind is capable of sadism and find it much more so that it is responding to genetic urges.

Because of this I find more convincing that the crime has as its root anti-social urgings of the mind on an instinctual level and it is only on a higher level that reasons like "sadism" come from. It is much like theft--also common in the animal kingdom--there are some who feel tempted to do it but are overruled by their minds, and there are some who give in to the urgings and then explain it to themselves in various ways. However it is certainly plausible that theft in the animal kingdom works indirectly to the advantage of the thief's genes.

As to Paul's request for an apology, if there were some set of words I could say that would improve the situation of the victims I would be very happy to say them. However, I do not understand Paul's leap in logic that discussing the causes on the perpetrator's part--independent of anything the victim has any control over--is insulting to the victim.

There is a good deal of common ground in Paul's and my point-of-view on this subject. Paul and I agree that rape is a VERY bad crime. Nor do we disagree that sadism may play a part at a higher level, at least when we are talking about humans. Where we disagree is that I say that instincts to reproduce genes may play a basic part. Paul calls that point of view "wrong" and goes further to call it "ignorant". I cannot imagine what incontrovertible evidence Paul thinks he has that he can with vehemence call another explanation "Wrong." As far as I know it is still an open question, but I admit I might be ignorant. So I call on Paul either to present his evidence that rules out instinct or to himself apologize. If he has the evidence I will certainly apologize.

Paul is certainly entitled to his opinion. But he has pegged his argument on a piece of political dogma that closes speculation does not do a service to rape victims. He may even be correct that he has the full answer, but by closing his mind to all other speculation he is doing a real disservice to rape victims.

Mark Leeper
MT 3D-441 957-5619

...mtgzx!leeper

Think like a man of action, act like a man of thought.
--Henri Bergson