

Lincroft-Holmdel Science Fiction Club
Club Notice - 1/22/86 -- Vol. 4, No. 27

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are on Wednesdays at noon.

LZ meetings are in LZ 3A-206; HO meetings are in HO 2N-523.

_D_A_T_E

_T_O_P_I_C

- 01/29 LZ: STAR SMASHERS OF THE GALAXY RANGERS by Harry Harrison (Humor)
02/05 HO: THE EYE IN THE PYRAMID by Shea and Wilson
02/12 MT: ?
02/19 LZ: WORLDS by Joe Haldeman (Politics)
02/26 HO: DUNE by Frank Herbert
03/19 HO: "Chronicles of Narnia" by C. S. Lewis

HO Chair is John Jetzt, HO 4F-528A (834-1563). LZ Chair is Rob Mitchell, LZ 1B-306 (576-6106). MT Chair is Mark Leeper, MT 3G-434 (957-5619). HO Librarian is Tim Schroeder, HO 2G-427A (949-5866). LZ Librarian is Lance Larsen, LZ 3C-219 (576-2668). Jill-of-all-trades is Evelyn Leeper, MT 1F-329 (957-2070).

1. Aw, rats. Just because the next topic for discussion in Lincroft will be "Humor in Science Fiction," Evelyn expects me to write an uproariously funny blurb about STAR SMASHERS OF THE GALAXY RANGERS, by Harry Harrison. Sorry, Evelyn, but I just can't do it. This book deserves better. It is an epic novel of Man's Search for Truth (or more accurately, Male-Teenage-Overachievers' Search for Interstellar Good Times and Heroics). This novel has all the classic elements of Golden Age Space Opera, and forces the reviewer to use lots of Capital Letters. Check it, and other serious SF works (like anything by Henry Kuttner, the HITCHHIKER'S series by Douglas Adams, or THE SPACE MERCHANTS by Pohl and Kornbluth), out on Wednesday, January 29th. [-rob mitchell, mtuxo!jrrt]

2. The Leeper film festival is back with double features, at least for a while. We are starting with one of the classic science fiction double features of the early 50's. Thursday night, January 30, at 7:30pm we will be showing:

George Pal's Classic Double Feature

WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE (1951) dir. by Rudolf Mate

WAR OF THE WORLDS (1953) dir. by Byron Haskin

WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE is Producer George Pal's followup to DESTINATION MOON. It is based on Bulmer and Wylie's novel about an alien world entering our solar system and colliding with Earth with unfortunate results. The film was a hit and convinced Paramount

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that a science fiction special effects spectacular might have boxoffice possibilities. The result, two years later, was Pal's adaptation of H. G. Wells's classic novel WAR OF THE WORLDS. This is one of the most fondly remembered films of the 50's. With hundreds of alien invasion films, none has ever equalled the power of WAR OF THE WORLDS.

Mark Leeper
MT 3G-434 957-5619
...mtgzz!leeper

The Darkwar Trilogy
by Paul Cook
Vol. I: Doomstalker
Vol. II: Warlock
Vol. III: Ceremony
reviewed by Dale Skran

Locus has called Cook the "master realist of the imagination," a title he well deserves, and never more so than with the "Darkwar" Series. Although labeled as a trilogy, it is really a single long novel that traces the life of one Marika, a huntress of the upper Pomath, a Silth, and in time, the Jiana, the doomstalker, the one who leaves nothing and everything behind.

Cook begins by detailing the life of a vaguely cat-like race (the meth) where female dominance via psychic powers has been established for millenia. The sun is cooling down, and a world-wide winter drives the planet into social chaos. Onto this stage comes Marika, perhaps the most powerful silth ever seen. Over the next two novels she learns to use her powers, and develops an overwhelming interest in flying the

darkships, wooden crosses that the silth can power across interstellar distances.

The silth are stalked by their inability to work together and their Greek-like refusal to develop and exploit technology, which is in the hands of a special male cast. In time the inevitable occurs, resulting in a vast conflict between the old and new, silth and brethren, witchcraft and technology, silth and silth. The conflict enters a new and deadly phase when a human starship is discovered and one silth faction seeks to exploit its technology against others.

Through it all Marika struggles to remain loyal to the traditions of both the silth and the upper Pomath, eventually drenching an entire planet and a human fleet in blood to return two urns of ashes to her original packstead. For all her vast power, an older, wiser Marika painfully realizes that she cannot hold back the march of time, and that in the face of the ravenous power of human technology, even silth witchcraft is not enough. Yet the silth were doomed not by the weakness of their witchcraft, but by their habit of clinging to the old ways, of putting the interests of a small group over the interests of the race, and their stubborn refusal to adopt the experimental mindset. Their glory and their fall are a metaphor we all should understand. Silth magic stands for all that which is powerful, yet irrelevant to the future, and there are many such forces on this Earth of ours.

The silth have a saying--"as strength goes"--not quite the same thing as "might makes right." Power is Power is Power, and those who forget that are doomed, even if they never have to face Marika and her awesome witcheries. Right or wrong is a question never asked as

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strength goes. Cook reminds us that ideas and visions have a power that outlast any leader, that determine the future without specifying it in detail. Even as Marika doomed the silth way of life by organizing a global project to build mirrors in space to drive back the winter, we too are daily taking similar irrevocable steps. There is no going back. There is only death and forward. Always. As strength goes.

Leather-bound Science Fiction
An article by Mark R. Leeper

For years there has been a small but virulent industry out there in the real world that takes classic books, like Plato's R_e_p_u_b_l_i_c, and binds them in rich leather covers with 14-caret lettering. They are dedicated to the proposition that it is the sizzle that sells and not the steak. Now everybody knows full well that there is no point in reading T_h_e_R_e_p_u_b_l_i_c bound in rich Corinthian leather. These days anyone who really appreciates T_h_e_R_e_p_u_b_l_i_c has read it in a dog-eared paperback that is at home in the back pocket of a pair of jeans and would look just atrocious on J. Paul Getty's shelf. There is, of course, a history of great books coming in fine bindings. When D_a_v_i_d_C_o_p_p_e_r_f_i_e_l_d was on the best-seller list, only the very rich would buy a book like T_h_e_R_e_p_u_b_l_i_c and it would be well-bound, and a well-bound edition would be read. But the binding in those days would be ununctional. It wouldn't have the edges of the pages tipped in 14-caret gold leaf. That is a very pretty touch for a closed book, but it makes the pages stick together and they are tough to turn. When you see a book with all that gold trim on the pages, you know it was published to sit on the shelf as a status symbol with no expectation that it would ever be read.

Easton Press of Norwalk, Connecticut, is trying a new approach to the status symbol press business. If other companies can make a bundle selling leather-bound editions of books like T_h_e_R_e_p_u_b_l_i_c, and with education on a down-swing if fewer and fewer high school graduates have ever heard of Plato's R_e_p_u_b_l_i_c, might they not get a leg up on the competition by putting science fiction in expensive bindings? Surely S_t_r_a_n_g_e_r_i_n_a_S_t_r_a_n_g_e_L_a_n_d_m_u_s_t have more appeal than Plato's R_e_p_u_b_l_i_c.

Ah, but here is the rub. There was a tradition at one point of having classic books in expensive bindings. But science fiction came along well after that period. Frederik Pohl's G_a_t_e_w_a_y is most at home in a well-worn paperback. For fancy occasions you might see it in a modest hardback edition. Putting G_a_t_e_w_a_y in gold-highlighted leather covers with gilt-edged pages and a ribbon bookmark sewn into the binding is like putting a pig in a tuxedo. These books will probably be nearly impossible to read. If someone dares to lay his hands on them for reading, that still will not be the "science fiction experience." You can't be thinking about the future while you are smelling the book covers. I suggest that Easton Press make some sort of arrangement with Grove Press. I can see putting S_t_o_r_y_o_f_O in leather!

SAVAGES

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: S_a_v_a_g_e_s is a microcosmic history of the world, told in allegory. The Mud People find a mansion and take on the roles of upper-class snobs for a night, then return to the jungle. The idea had possibilities but the execution was pretentious and dull. Avoid this one.

Back when T_h_e_G_o_d_s_M_u_s_t_B_e_C_r_a_z_y was released, the published plot reminded me of a review I read in the early 70's of a film about jungle savages who find a croquet ball and, in returning it, find a mansion and begin taking up roles of people living in the mansion. The film, S_a_v_a_g_e_s, is now available on videocassette so I rented it for comparison.

S_a_v_a_g_e_s, made in 1972 in Tarrytown, New York, was a film before its time. Pray God that time never comes. In Greenwich Village, where art films are popular, the film played a remarkable four days before word-of-mouth killed it. The film indeed falls neatly between T_h_e_G_o_d_s_M_u_s_t_B_e_C_r_a_z_y (which it may have inspired) and K_i_n_g_o_f_H_e_a_r_t_s (which may have inspired it). That may well be loftier company than the film deserves. Somehow related to Dr. Who's TARDIS, the film is hours longer on the inside than it is on the outside.

S_a_v_a_g_e_s opens with an introductory sequence showing the savages happening on the mansion and putting on the clothing they find in the mansion. After this short prologue, the film takes the form of an interminable upper-class house party done in a surrealistic style in which anything can happen as long as it doesn't make sense. One moment the guests are all dancing to "Stepping on the Spaniel" (a lilting song about the joys of treading on dogs), the next two lesbian lovers are discussing how to remove hair from the face while they are making love. Every once in a while a narrator chimes in, apparently to explain what is going on--in German, though the rest of the film is in English.

Fine actors wasted in this film include Thayer David and Sam

Waterston. If you found L_a_s_t_Y_e_a_r_a_t_M_a_r_i_e_n_b_a_d, you'll find S_a_v_a_g_e_s even worse. If you wish to see it, do so without me. On the -4 to +4 scale, I give it a confused -2, but when I can think more clearly I may not like it as much.

N_O_T_E_S_F_R_O_M_T_H_E_N_E_T

Subject: "Brokedown Palace" by Steven Brust
Path: bellcore!decvax!ittatc!ittvax!dann
Date: Fri, 3-Jan-86 15:04:38 EST

***** (Spoilers ahead!...) *****

Well, I thought it might be fun to read to. Basically, I was wrong. It's hard to pin down exactly what's wrong with "Brokedown Palace".

Style:

The first chapter or so of BP seems to be an attempt to emulate the style of a Zelazny novel. Nothing wrong with that, except that it doesn't really work. Most of the novel is written in the rather simplistic style of a Grimms Fairy tale. To heighten the effect, there are various interludes describing the folklore of Brust's mythical kingdom. Most of the interludes are entertaining enough but irrelevant to the main story.

Characters:

The biggest flaws seem to be the characters. They seem to sort of drift around for most of the book. The reactions of all the characters to

almost any event is to sit around and discuss it. Motivations for most of the events are pretty slight. ("You really think I should kill the Goddess, Bolk? OK, might as well...).

The hero, Miklos, starts off the book in fairly bad shape, having been beaten nearly to death by his brother, Laszlo, King of Falerria (sp?), for a minor provocation. Miraculously healed and befriended by a talking horse, Miklos drifts off to the land of Faery for a couple of years for no better reason than that he has nowhere else to go. He's not pissed at his brother, he's not out to usurp the kingdom, he's basically sort of a lump. Two years later, Miklos returns. Now he's got the Power, but he's still a nebbish. Does he do anything with the Power? No, not really.

The character Laszlo is particularly inconsistent. He's willing to kill a brother for criticizing the state of repair of a bedroom, but shrugs off the treason of his captain of the guards because he's a good officer.

Plot:

Well, what there is of it concerns the decay of the ancestral palace and the attempts by Miklos to do something about it. (Purposely left vague

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for those who haven't read the book yet.) There isn't a lot here to get excited about as the reader doesn't really care a lot about the royal palace of Falaria.

Still, there are good things about the plot. Most significantly, there's no evil wizard or Sauron-type baddie who has to be offed in the last chapter. On current fantasy, this is a sizeable recommendation.

Cover/Blurb:

Probably the most significant reason why I didn't care for BP is that the blurbs on the backcover led me to expect something substantially more lighthearted.

Recommendation:

Brokedown Palace is *really* light reading without a really satisfying conclusion. On the Leeper scale, probably a 0 out of 4.

dann

Subject: JINIAN FOOTSEER by Sheri S. Tepper (mild spoiler)

Path: whuxl!whuxlm!akgua!gatech!seismo!hao!noao!terak!mot!anasazi!duane

Date: Thu, 2-Jan-86 11:27:45 EST

The jacket reads:

"Bright the sun burning,
Night will come turning
Mothwings go spinning,
End and beginning,
Eye of the Star,
Where Old Gods are.

Players, take your places...The Land itself calls Game!"

If you haven't read one of Ms. Tepper's previous novels (KING'S BLOOD FOUR, NECROMANCER NINE, or WIZARD'S ELEVEN), the information on the jacket won't mean anything.

In this world people either have a Talent (such as seeing the future, reading minds, and following tracks) or they don't. A Talentless person is called a pawn. A person with one or more Talents usually falls into a particular class for that combination, and one of the things just about everyone learns is the Index which lists the known classifications. More often than not, people with Talents compete against each other, sometimes just to see who has more skill, but frequently with the intent to injure or kill.

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This particular book concerns a teenage girl, Jinian. Her mother is the top lady at a castle, but she only cares for her sons. Jinian is taken under wing by six pawns, women who teach her the "Wize arts". Various adventures take place thanks to Jinian's troublesome relatives.

I was fascinated by this book. Jinian appears partway through WIZARD'S ELEVEN, and this book explains how she got there. The story is just as interesting and exciting as those told by Peter Shapechanger (the narrator of the other three novels), starting slowly and increasing in pace until you don't want to put the book down. The world is one more of fantasy than science fiction, but it is very complex and well thought out.

One bit of advice in reading WIZARD'S ELEVEN and JINIAN FOOTSEER. The last chapter of JINIAN FOOTSEER summarizes Jinian's part in WIZARD'S ELEVEN. This comes after the climax, so it doesn't mean that you have to read WIZARD'S ELEVEN first in order to enjoy the book. However, if you haven't read WIZARD'S ELEVEN, I recommend skipping the last chapter (19) because it may spoil reading WIZARD'S ELEVEN.

I give the book 3.5 stars (very, very good).

Duane Morse ...!noao!terak|anasazi!duane

Subject: CHILD OF FORTUNE by Norman Spinrad
Path: mtuxo!drutx!ihnp4!cbosgd!gatech!ut-sally!topaz!rubin
Date: Tue, 7-Jan-86 02:29:31 EST

CHILD OF FORTUNE, by Norman Spinrad. (Bantam, 1985, 483 pp., \$16.95)
Review by Michael Rubin.

I can't figure out why a book like CHILD OF FORTUNE would be written in 1985; it seems trapped in the Sixties, somewhere between Haight-Ashbury and Never-Never Land. It isn't an examination of or coming to terms with the hippie phenomenon, but a fairly heavy romanticization. Yet despite this odd choice of starting point it is an altogether well-told and delightful story.

The premise is that in a healthy society, teenagers are given a "wanderjahr", a rite of passage consisting of spending year or so out on the road to discover oneself. (Aborigines on walkabout, gypsies, tinkers, ronin and hippies are listed as early versions.) Moussa, the spoiled, precocious daughter of fashionable artists, goes for her wanderjahr to planet Edoku. She meets the king of the funky street people, a possibly immortal fellow styling himself "Pater Pan", who renames her Sunshine and convinces her to be a storyteller. Then follow a series of adventures, including a new and scary version of the story of the Lotus Eaters. By the end of the book she has renamed herself Wendi, and is a writer and an interstellar celebrity and presumably lives happily ever after (unless there's a sequel).

In the meantime Spinrad delivers a lot of wisdom about storytelling and archetypes from the mouths of the various storyteller and writer characters. That seems to be stylish in fiction these days, and I'm not sure whether I agree with (or understand) all he has to say. But he is consciously writing an archetypical rite-of-passage story with lots of archetype characters, and all the references seem to click (and it's a GOOD archetypical rite-of-passage story). The language is flowery and rather precious, with bits of French, German, Japanese and a few more languages sprinkled around. This speech pattern is appropriate for the jet-set heroine but some readers may find it tough going.

My personal problem with this book was, again, the premise. In 1969 I was in a fashionably liberal private grade school in Manhattan, painting peace signs in Arts & Crafts, unaware that students were rioting two miles away at Columbia and not even really conscious that there were poor people living on the next block. The world of CHILD OF FORTUNE seems nearly as sanitized: no politics or war intrude, people are poor only by choice, and the only major sin is to be spiritually unfulfilled. As much as this situation is beautiful and romantic and wouldn't-it-be-lovely, I'm not sure how much it has to say about actual people. Give it +1 on the -4 to +4 Leeper scale.

Oh yes, it seems to be the same universe as THE VOID CAPTAIN'S TALE, which I haven't read.

Subject: Description is necessary, even in science fiction

Path: mtuxo!drutx!druri!dht

Date: Wed, 8-Jan-86 14:36:12 EST

".Which brings us back to Liz Lynn's work, specifically with matters of sexuality. Too often she creates characters who are almost smugly at peace with themselves. Who gives a damn? I don't want to read about a happy homosexual, any more than I want to read about a happy heterosexual--at least, I don't want to read about their sex life if it's working fine. If there are no problems, why bring it up? (And not just internal problems, of course. Problems with outsiders or persecution or whatever count, but those also have internal implications.) So if a character's sexuality is important enough to bring it into the story, then it should AFFECT the story importantly. This may be too rigorous a standard, of course. Remember, I'm the guy who excises every shred of description that isn't essential to the plot. You never even know the color of ENDER WIGGINS' hair during two long novels. So I have a bias against inclusion of gratuitous material of any type.)..."

Card glosses over what is so often lost in modern fiction, and modern science fiction particularly: the *lack* of description. It is

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important, in many novels, to get across atmosphere. You don't do this with dialogue, with narrative point-of-view, or with exposition (the bane of science fiction is the Expository Break). You do it with description. Otherwise, the writer has done little more than write a screenplay for a director to flesh out. Why did Tolstoy bother to describe Anna Karenina's eyes to us? Why did Melville describe Billy Budd in aching detail? Why did Dickens describe Uriah Heep down to the last disgusting quirk? It was, and is, important to be able to fully visualize an important character if for nothing else than to define them as real, living, flawed, human beings. So many modern novels barely pause to let the reader catch his breath - Luc Sante hit the nail on the head when he called it "word-processor style" - short paragraphs, inattention to previous detail, hurriedness, and callousness towards characters, even when sympathetically portrayed. It seems to be at the root, a response in print to America's increasing love affair with the television, the video recorder, and the movie. As we as a society cast off print and become visually and aurally oriented, we accept the language of film and television more readily than that of print (as McLuhan suggested). In other words, perhaps it is no longer necessary for most people to have a chair described to them, because the visual image of a chair is already very concrete and defined, and reinforced with daily viewing of chairs in all kinds of circumstances. People become more used to the hurried pace of visual media, and are bored with what once was considered adequate description in a novel, description which takes a second (at most) in a film. This is merely a progression, and not necessarily a bad one. But the problem is that when description is absolutely vital, it is wan, thin, and insubstantial. Mood and atmosphere can be communicated in a film without the viewer being consciously aware, without any time hardly being taken out from the story line at all - Hitchcock's threatening house in "Psycho", Capra's Main Street in "It's A Wonderful Life", Weir's barnbuilding in "Witness". A writer owes it to readers to establish such a mood and define things exactly in order not to cheat them of such resonance.

Nowadays, our characters are defined by what they do, what they believe in, and (if we are lucky) by what they think. We rarely get to see the look on the other person's face, furrowed in concentration, sweating a little underneath the eyes, with a strand of hair blowing in the slight breeze of a ship at anchor against the ebb tide. Our adjectives have been pared down, like reading a book from Orwell's society, everything simplified to "double-plus-ungood" from "ghastly" or "horrid" or "terrible". If language and vocabulary are not used, they atrophy and wither away. I wanted to know Ender's hair color, I wanted to know what his face looked like, what color his eyes were, what his sweat smelled like, I wanted him to be real and breathing, not an abstraction of the warrior-innocent, the child of war. This is all good and well in escapist, juvenile literature where people don't sweat and no one is ugly unless they're Bad Guys. In "Ender's Game" (the novella), Card gets away with this because children often don't recall such things as the color of someone's hair - or else they forget later on, as they grow older - and his story was of children, and could reasonably be told in a

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child-like manner as regards description. I think of Orwell, and his giant talent for description coupled with his sensitive social conscience, who described to us a society of blandness, of oppressive sameness, of subtle and dreary brutalization, and yet he made it vivid, and real, and powerful, visceral. You felt Winston facing the rats.

Description, even when seemingly superfluous on first reading, is often the glue that holds a tale together, that keeps the authorial intent clear and apparent without being overbearing. You can only talk of ideas for so long, and then it gets pedantic. Just as you can only describe trees for so long and get boring. In a short story, the ruthless elimination of detail is often necessary, but too many of our novels read like long short stories. Women are described as being beautiful, without our being able to form our own opinion of beauty directed, of course, by the author's description. This casting-off of description often leads authors into the wasteland of "idea literature", without being able to make it real. An author must be able to make his readers feel pain, and failure, and success, and hatred and joy and the gamut of human emotion, and description is the key to this, even when it seems unnecessary. For all his faults, Hunter Thompson has this gift of description, and is successful because of this, no matter how warped and twisted his descriptions are, they taste of the real because he

bothers to describe things to us. You see, if I say something is blood red, and one hundred pages on it is purple, that requires tedious re-reading. If I never describe it at all, I have less work to do. And I have accomplished less, and in some sense I have failed because I have left too much up to the reader's imagination, and not given him the resonance and meaning that great description can do. To say something is blood red is to bring up images of death, pain, and war. To say that it is merely red is to leave the image up to the reader, or to deny that it has any meaning whatsoever, even when it might. Our adjectives are leaving us, slowly and surely, and they sail away on a rusty freighter flying a plague flag, out of the dying port of a nation conquered one hundred years ago in a horrible war of attrition and starvation, sailing into a polluted sunset over an oily sea.

Davis Tucker

Subject: _Wizard of the Pigeons_
Path: ihnp4!cbosgd!ukma!psuvm.bitnet!psuvax1!burdvax!sdcrcf!ucla-cs!srt
Date: Thu, 9-Jan-86 15:04:01 EST

Megan Lindholm, _Wizard of the Pigeons_, Ace Fantasy, ISBN 0-441-89467-4

The Mindholm book I bought because of Steven Brust's recommendation:
"The blend of action and sensitivity that I've come to expect from Ms. Lindholm and much more. Beauty, terror, and wonder. This is a truly excellent book."

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I couldn't agree more. I like the premise, too, which is that some of the bums you see around the city are actually wizards of different sorts, who make their lives in other ways, ways less congenial to modern life. The title character is one such person. His gift is to be able to always give a truthful answer to questions put to him. Not always a useful gift. But like all magic, it has its rules and limitations. Soon the Wizard finds his rules being broken, and he loses his magic, existing in a shadowy realm between worlds while the wizards and the modern day world fight for his identity.

Scott R. Turner

Subject: _Marianne, the Magus and the Manticore_
Path: ihnp4!cbosgd!ukma!psuvm.bitnet!psuvax1!burdvax!sdcrcf!ucla-cs!srt
Date: Thu, 9-Jan-86 15:04:01 EST

Sheri S. Tepper, _Marianne, the Magus and the Manticore_, Ace Fantasy,
ISBN 0-441-51944-X

I'm a fan of Tepper, so I bought her latest book despite the annoying cover and back cover blurbs. The cover has a rather lurid painting of a woman on the back of a Chimera and the back cover blurb is an annoying analgram of the plot. You can safely ignore both.

(* slight spoiler -- introduction to the plot *)

The story itself is fascinating. I was glued to the book from the start till nearly the end. Marianne is a graduate student in ethnology who discovers that she is related to the ruling family of a small European country when the Prime Minister of the country arrives to give a lecture at her college. Though shy of personal relationships, she warms to him. He is Makr Ahvel, a Magus, and when he visits her apartment he finds the gifts she has recently received from her half-brother ominous. Taken as a whole they represent a powerful malign enchantment. Startled to find this kind of thing, Makr Ahvel becomes more involved with the girl and together they are drawn into false worlds and strange happenings.

My only objections to this excellent book are the packaging, which I've already put down, and the ending, which like so much of the fantasy printed today, has sequel written all over it.

Another excellent book. Read these two books and see _Brazil_ for a wonderful (but sometimes disturbing) weekend of alternate views of reality.

Scott R. Turner

Subject: LeGuin's Always Coming Home

Path: ihnp4!houxm!whuxl!whuxlm!akgua!gatech!ut-sally!topaz!caip!Newman.pasa

Date: Fri, 10-Jan-86 11:29:31 EST

Mild Spoilers of content (though not of plot) follow

A comment in a posting on another subject prompted me to tell of my impression of LeGuin's latest novel, "Always Coming Home". From the cover blurbs and the admittedly brief mention of the book in the media, I was lead to believe that this was LeGuin's greatest novel - her best work of all time. I'm sorry, but I was disappointed.

First, the book is not really a novel. As is explained in the Introduction, the book is a future archaeology. There is one story that is the largest part of the book, and by itself it would make a short novel or a novella. However, the book also includes other material to round out the picture of the future society that is its main focus. There is poetry, and there are descriptions of many facets of the society, including naming conventions, music, artwork, and technology. And yes, this is the book that comes with a cassette tape including examples of the music and speech described in the book.

The fact that the book was not really a novel was not really a problem. For the most part LeGuin has done her job well, as everything is well-worked out, consistent, and interesting. The main problem is that it feels as though one is reading an editorial in the newspaper. LeGuin has created a Utopia, and in describing it proceeds to critique modern civilization quite severely. The heavy-handed social commentary was too much for me; I do not mind criticism of society, or books with a MESSAGE, but this was too much. As a matter of fact, I agree with much of what she has to say - I just don't like the way she says it.

The non-novel aspects of the book would have made good background for LeGuin to use in writing a number of stories. However, there are a number of short sections wherein LeGuin (calling herself Pandora) addresses the reader directly. This is a stylistic device that I could have done without. Also, I found the tape recording boring and artificial sounding.

To situate my opinions, I will say that I enjoyed the Earthsea trilogy immensely, and that I found Malfarena interesting if a bit dry. I could not stomach The Left Hand of Darkness at all. So, the end result is that I do not recommend this book.

>>Dave

Subject: "The Earth's Children Series: Clan of the Cave Bear", Jean M. Auel

Path: houxm!mhuxt!mhuxr!ulysses!burl!clyde!watmath!utzoo!utcsri!utai!perelgut

Date: Sun, 12-Jan-86 17:16:22 EST

The Clan of the Cave Bear, Jean M. Auel, Bantam Books, 1980 (paperback)

This is my second time through this book, in preparation for reading the third book in the series, "The Mammoth Hunters". The Earth's Children Series is not really science fiction. And it sure isn't fantasy. But it seems appropriate for this group. The series deals with the life and times of an early homo sapiens forced by circumstances to live with Neanderthals.

This book is excellent, the woodlore seems as completely researched, and the characters are vivid. The author has taken very few liberties, all required to advance the plot. For example, Neanderthals have a form of tribal memory that can be brought out by a sort of telepathic trance. I doubt there is hard achaeological evidence of such a trait. Also, our heroine stands a bit larger than life, constantly making startling discoveries or drawing conclusions that are very far removed from her own experience.

In spite of what I perceived as inconsistencies, the book hangs together remarkably well. It is very easy to visualize yourself in the correct environment and to empathize with the characters. Even on second reading, the detailed descriptions of the people and the land held as much interest as they did the first time.

On my scale of -4 to +4, I'd easily rate this one a +3. There are a few flaws, but they are minor and easily overlooked as you consume this slice of life from the end of an Ice Age.

Stephen Perelgut Computer Systems Research Institute, University of Toronto

Subject: "The Earth's Children Series: Valley of Horses", Jean M. Auel
Path: houxm!mhuxt!mhuxr!ulysses!burl!clyde!watmath!utzoo!utcsri!utai!perelgut
Date: Sun, 12-Jan-86 17:18:02 EST

The Valley of Horses, Jean M. Auel, Bantam Books, 1982 (paperback)

This is the second book in the Earth's Children Series by Jean Auel.
This is my second time through this book, in preparation for reading the

next book in the series, "The Mammoth Hunters".

The first 350 or so pages of the 550 page tome are split between Ayla's continuing saga in the Valley of Horses and the story of two brothers, Jondalar and Thonolan, who are undertaking a Journey. Ayla has been cursed and is now living on her own. She still thinks of herself more as Clan than Other, and in some ways this is more a story of her acceptance of her heritage and destiny than anything else.

I found myself getting pretty impatient for the two story lines to join. I remember when I first read this book, I felt pretty much the same way.

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But Auel has adopted a dime-novel romance style and obviously wanted to exploit it fully. Substitute a castle turret for the cave and you almost have a classic gothic romance. But mixed in are details of life as a human being 30,000 B.C.

In spite of the rather trashy romantic interludes (our heroine is a tall, slender, gorgeous blond with large breasts - and she thinks she's ugly; our hero is a 6'6" tall muscular blond who is repeatedly described as irresistibly sexy and unbelievably tender and the best lover in at least 3 tribes) I love Ms Auel's imagery. However, the power of the images makes the first 350 or so pages disconcerting to read since they alternate between our hero (oh yeah, he has a large cock and knows how to use it), and our heroine. I found it was best at times to put the book down at the end of a chapter and come back to it in a few minutes. At other times, I couldn't put it down even though I've read it before.

I found this book very hard to rate. There are places where it is as good as anything I've ever read, and there are places where it is as bad as I imagine Harlequin romances would be. There's a good 100-or-so pages where the lover's are desperately yearning for each other and yet very depressed over the fact that the other "won't like them." And these are people who discover how to use flint and iron to make fire; and how to make a spear thrower given the concepts of spear and slingshot; and learn how to talk in a couple of days.

On my scale of -4 to +4, I think I'd rate this a +2. There are probably 250-300 pages worth of +4, and almost as many that I'd rate -2 or worse. It's the description of the land and how to survive, and the

believability that earns this book my final rating. You'll probably enjoy reading it, and if you hit a bad spot, just remember there'll be a diamond just beyond that cesspool.

Stephen Perelgut Computer Systems Research Institute, University of Toronto

Subject: "The Earth's Children Series: Mammoth Hunters", Jean M. Auel
Path: houxm!mhuxt!mhuxr!ulysses!burl!clyde!watmath!utzoo!utcsri!utai!perelgut
Date: Sun, 12-Jan-86 17:20:09 EST

The Mammoth Hunters, Jean M. Auel, Crown Publishers, 1985 (paperback)

This is the third (and so far last) book in the Earth's Children Series by Jean M. Auel. It deals with the lives of humans during the ice ages 30000 or so years ago. In particular, it deals with Ayla, a homo sapiens who was brought up by Neanderthals until she turned 15, then lived alone for 2 years, and started this book by living with a tribe of homo sapiens from a large group known as the Mamuti.

The book starts out great, and goes into the usual detail of the lives and customs of the first humans. Because of the writing style and

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imagery, you are willing to accept almost anything Ms. Auel felt had to be added to advance the plot. Our heroine has discovered modern medicine (including stitches), Bic lighters (sort of), spear throwers, and animal husbandry (including being the first being to ride a horse). In this book, she discovers sewing (needles with eyes for threads), etc.

However, the last 400 or so pages (out of roughly 650) are shit. Ms. Auel has a talent for making a scene of tender, romantic lovemaking about as interesting as eating raw liver. The last 2/3 of the book deal with Ayla's true love for Jondalar, how they love each other soooooo much that they can't see it (???), how Ayla makes every man's blood boil, and how she lives with and loves another man for a good 250-300 pages in spite of all that. Even the other characters in the book (who take a decidedly second-row seat to this crap and suffer as a result) can see what's happening.

The "other man" is black, beautiful, has a large cock (all the main characters are well endowed), makes love like anything, is an artist, and has rythm. He's also the only black in the book. I would usually say SPOILER here, but if you miss this on or about page 1 you shouldn't be allowed out in public without a keeper or seeing-eye dog. Ayla and Jondalar meet in a tender and yet boring and meaningless scene with only 5 or so pages to go. Some cliffhanger romance.

The magic and beauty of the first two books is so completely subsumed in this non-existent romantic triangle that everything stands out in sharp relief. Where I forgave artifices meant to advance the plot in the first two books, they stand out and act further against the book and the plot. The mysticism that was kept only in the background for the other books becomes a major force with the Mamut (medicine man) constantly saying Ayla has a destiny. Even Ayla worries about this. As a reader, it makes me wonder why Ms. Auel had to include it after writing such excellent books without resorting to it in the past.

I figure that Ms. Auel:

- a) hasn't made love in years
- or b) had a major stroke after writing the first 1/3 of the book
- or c) was given a subscription to Harlequin romances and it warped her mind.
- or d) had the book ghostwritten by someone named Bambi.

On my scale of -4 to +4, this book rates a -1. I'd have gone for -3 except for the first 1/3 and the occaisional (but very infrequent) bursts of magic like those that fill most of the first two books. Don't rush to read this one, wait for it in used paperback shops or borrow it if you're bedridden.

P.S. The worst (or best?) thing about this book is that it is obvious we can expect at least one other book and probably many more. I don't think I'll be sucked into paying hardcover prices again without seeing a review first.

Subject: Re: Descriptions in Books

Path: mtuxo!drutx!ihnp4!qantel!lll-crg!caip!woody%Romeo

Date: Sun, 12-Jan-86 20:37:01 EST

Bravo, Davis Tucker.

After reading his thought provoking essay on description, I slowly climbed out of my chair, crossed the cluttered hovel that is my home, and pulled some of the dust covered books from the makeshift shelf where they rest. Of the tattered, dogeared books which I love and re-read the most, not a one lack the element of description so important to conveying an interesting (or not so interesting) idea into a very interesting story.

Many years ago, I took a class on filmmaking. The important element of creating a film from a book is reducing the essence of the book to fit in the rather short length of time the movie must take place in. This is done by taking rather lengthy descriptions and reducing them to the appropriate props in the appropriate backdrops, with appropriately dressed people doing the appropriate action. And this works very well in motion picture. But not in books! When a woman is described in a screen play as "beautiful", you ask Casting for a lot of beautiful women and the author looks over all of them, until he finds the one who is "perfect". But when you say "beautiful" in a book without any other description, the author has one picture in mind, the reader cannot help but form another picture, and communication is lost. The author loses control over his story. Instead of telling us stories about giants and armies marching across blood-stained fields or of gleaming spaceships racing across a starry sky, the storyteller is doing nothing except putting words on paper for money.

Ideas are easy. Just sitting here I can daydream hours on end about worlds and universes. How about a world where the Cold War has lasted long enough that divergent evolution causes the creation of two species of man? Or a world where man was created as an accidental mutation in the genetics laboratory of Neanderthals? Or even the old standby, life after nuclear war? See? Ideas are very easy. Plots are almost as easy, too. But true story writing, putting words on paper which describes to aching detail the action of the men in this world trying to achieve their goals; turning a "beautiful woman" into a five foot two, red haired beauty with soft green eyes, full lips, and a passion for abstract geometry; these acts take the talent of a professional.

William Woody

Subject: Spinrad & Child of Fortune
Path: mtuxo!drutx!ihnp4!qantel!lll-crg!caip!jbvb
Date: Sun, 12-Jan-86 22:58:36 EST

I haven't read "Child of Fortune" (COF), but I have read "The Void Captain's Tale" (VCT) and several other Spinrad books. I have liked them all, but have so far avoided "The Mind Game" because its subject looks like one that would both raise my ire and depress me. The author's mindset seems to derive a great deal from the pre-commercialization "flower" movement. What he is doing is projecting forward this mindset (lifesytle/philosophy/whatever) into futures where technology has removed greed and hunger as causes of conflict. So what happens? Rather than simply dismissing it (like Niven did in "Safe at Any Speed"), in VCT he illustrates the downfall/triumph of a member of that culture confronted with a challenge/frontier. It sounds like COF illustrates coming-of-age in such a society.

As far as where Spinrad is coming from, mentally, emotionally and politically, to a certain extent 'you hadda be there'. The part of the '60s he likes had much more going on than simply war protests. I got my appreciation 2nd and 3rd hand while at school in the mid '70s but you could try sitting down some day and reading "The Electric Kool Aid Acid Test" (Wolfe), "Journey to Ixtlan" (Castaneda), "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas" (Thompson) and "Another Roadside Attraction" (Robbins) while listening to Jefferson Airplane and the Woodstock album.

James B. VanBokkelen

Subject: Re: Charlie Martin on Description
Path: mtuxo!drutx!druri!dht
Date: Mon, 13-Jan-86 16:50:37 EST

CHARLIE MARTIN:

Furthermore, I think the examples you have chosen support my point: Tolstoy described Anya's eyes to us simply because it was important for us to be (in some sense) in love with her physical appearance ourselves -- otherwise we won't understand what happens later. Similarly with Billy Budd: we have to get at his innocence somehow -- since Melville was not working in any omnipotent or semi-omnipotent viewpoint, he chose to make this clear to us by Billy's physical appearance.

No real disagreement, but remember - a novel is more than a short story.

How else are you going to provide atmosphere? Are you going to send a tape out with every book that says "Play this while reading"? A character *is* defined by more than what they do and what they think - Would Cyrano de Bergerac be as fascinating if he didn't have a big nose and everybody had always made jokes about it? A character is a

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plurality, and like any human being, to describe them fully is important - and this also includes physical description. It certainly alters my perception if a character is ugly or beautiful, or short or tall. You may say that this is unimportant; I think we have all accepted that in life, as the feminists have taught us, it is unfair to consider such outward attributes as sex or appearance. But we are not blind, deaf, and dumb, and we react toward physical appearance in certain ways, ways which authors should know and use. I use your examples: Tolstoy described her eyes to get *us* to recognize Anna's beauty, he did not say (as is painfully common in fantasy and sometimes science fiction) "She was beautiful, and men fought over her." He leads us into it with a sure and steady hand, taking his time, letting us fall in love with her. The above sentence from fantasy would have sufficed for pages of "Anna Karenina", but it would definitely have failed to provide us with a real, breathing human being to follow through a plot. As to your point about Melville, why is it that so many authors today use the omnipotent viewpoint, that "anything I say about the characters is true and you must suspend disbelief"? This works fine for comic books (although increasingly, the cutting edge of comics is providing us with better, more real characters and more literature than science fiction). Melville never assumed an omnipotent voice, and neither did most of the great authors of the golden age of the novel. Today in science fiction almost everyone, it seems, refuses to allow their characters a voice, and speak through them like a bad Mexican ventriloquist (especially Heinlein, Clarke, and Asimov). Certainly, authors speak through their characters; great authors do not do it so baldly and badly that the reader is left unconvinced. Melville convinced you that Billy Budd was innocent, Dickens convinced you that Oliver Twist was a victim of society, Dostoevsky convinced you that Raskolnikov was guilty of more than murder.

Anyway, despite all this rambling and mumbo-jumbo, I cannot agree that a character is the sum of what he says, thinks, and does, no more than a human being is. Who was it who said "A man is three things: what he

thinks he is, what others think he is, and what he really is"? Characters are people, and in rare instances are people who are so real they ache, they become more real and alive than anyone you know. Ivan Karamazov. Fagin. Jean Valjean. Hunter Thompson's Samoan attorney. Macbeth. Othello. Anyone in a Jim Harrison novel. Their concerns and sweat and hungers and idle musings and problems assume a heightened position, a hyper-reality, by dint of craftsmanship, work, description, sympathy, and art (sorry to use such foul language).

for us to accept him and to develop the relationship we must for the fiction to become a vivid dream (you knew I was going to say it at least once, right?)

Yes, but why'd you keep me in agonizing suspense for so long?

Hemingway -- no slouch of a writer there -- consciously avoided the use of adjectives. And did it completely intentionally: (although

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I can't find the reference right now, so this won't be a direct quote) he wrote about this that he felt it was none of his business how we saw his characters, and that he didn't want to make judgements for us. He wanted us simply to understand them and make our own judgements. For this reason, he avoided the use of adjectives whenever possible.

I think we both agree that this trend has gone too far. Hemingway was a reaction against the flowery prose of Joyce and others (in some ways, a latter-day Kipling against Henry James). The pendulum of description (especially in science fiction which generally tends to think of description as being the stuff you put in so the fifteen year old mind who's reading this stuff will understand that the hero couldn't get away from the rampaging fricatoscatous without remembering to turn the discombobulator attachment on his wingwang to "stun") has swung too far, too. Too many writers use Hemingway's justifications to cover up word-processor laziness.

Again with reference to Ender's Game, most of the novel was from Ender's point of view, and the central point of the novel was how his point of view changed and what doing what he did *felt like.*

Remember that I said that "Ender's Game" worked. Not many do, but as I have maintained before, Card is an exception. I also would point out that Card, despite what he may say, has used quite a lot of description in his work, and has quite a talent for it.

Your last point is that if one never describes at all, one has less work to do.

Well, it's true that descriptive passages are often unfortunately used as padding. But it's interesting that the writers who will take incredible pains to detail about plot and "world-building" will spend little time and effort on describing their characters, and building atmosphere. It's a two-edged sword, but I was mainly referring to novels, and not to short stories, in which (as I noted) description has to be pared down, usually, unless it's a slice-of-life piece.

because if the imagination is clear enough, the real details will carry without them.

Bushwah. What are you talking about - virtual description? I assume you're saying that if an author has his character say "I'm horrible, I'm ugly, I'm human garbage, I should be dead" that this will convey to me that he's another Quasimodo? Explain, please, with examples.

This is a nice example of what can be done with adjectives: (forgive me) overwritten, daubed over with sentiment, painted in garish colors like Socialist Realism paintings above Lenin's tomb. But (if these shipboard adjectives were characters), it would tell us nothing about them: it doesn't make us see the sunset better (a

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polluted sunset often has the most wonderful colors), it doesn't tell us how *they* feel about the war (why are they leaving? are they the conquerors or the conquered?), and it tugs at our gut level emotional response like a collie puppy in a pet-store display. Far better to make a story from what a character thinks, feels, and believes than to have to get one's effects through tricks that put one in mind of the oncoming trains in a 3D movie.

Well, it was purposefully overblown to the point of silliness, so what? I wanted to get my point across with a hammer. And certainly I didn't

describe these shipboard characters except collectively, such as an author would do describing a multitude in a crowd scene. BUT WHAT I LOVE THE MOST IS THAT *YOU* USED A LOT OF DESCRIPTION! I mean "painted in garish colors like Socialist Realism paintings above Lenin's tomb" isn't exactly "I came, I saw, I conquered", now is it? You used description to get across your point, not dry ideas and conceptualizing gobbledygook. Sincerely - bravo.

Davis Tucker

Subject: NIGHT OF POWER by Spider Robinson
Path: mtuxo!houxm!hropus!riccb!ihopa!ihnp4!cbosgd!gatech!seismo!caip!hoey
Date: Wed, 15-Jan-86 18:00:19 EST

Spider Robinson's new novel is out in paperback. NIGHT OF POWER is a near-future look at the prognosis for racial conflict in the United States. It's got startlingly realistic cultural and technological extrapolation, full of the usual Spider lovingkindness and tender philosophy, leavened with an unusual amount of sex and violence. People whose stomachs will not take the S&V are to be pitied, for they will miss a good read. People who *like* S&V will be teased, but not spoiled, by the information that he describes an achingly beautiful first orgasm, and the most imaginative homicide I have ever heard of.

For those of you who want to see slant labels on their sex, let me warn you that the sex is all hetero, and touches on (and occasionally fondles) prostitution, rape, pubescents, adultery, and (gasp) miscegenation. This notice is a transparent excuse for offering my opinion that people who want sexual orientation labels on book covers have their head in the sand or worse. I'd rather that novelists feel free to include whatever form of sexuality will serve their theme, but that warning labels be required on the dull, trite, boring, unreadable, stupid slush that fills ninety percent of the bookshelves. Which is harder to identify with, characters full of lust for members of their own sex, or characters full of nothing at all?

I am glad to see that Spider, famed nemesis of the Hax of Sol III, has taken the initiative in instituting my scheme of warnings. The absence of inanity labels on NIGHT OF POWER is true truth in advertising.

Dan

Subject: adjectives

Path: mtuxo!houxm!whuxl!whuxlm!akgua!gatech!seismo!caip!PLATT

Date: Wed, 15-Jan-86 20:34:20 EST

Well, I'm by no means a professional writer, but I have heard some professional writers talk about technique. The one thing I seem to recall is that description is good, but adjectives are (relatively) bad. In other words, use you non-ordinary nouns and verbs to convey description, not long strings of adjectives and adverbs. Thus, "Jerry snarled" is better than "Jerry violently said." This seems reasonable to me.

john platt

Subject: Review: Jewel of the Nile (no spoilers)

Path: mtuxo!houxm!vax135!cornell!uw-beaver!fluke!moriarty

Date: Mon, 6-Jan-86 16:25:13 EST

While certainly not up to Robert Zemarkis's original film, this is not the piece of excrement that the majority of reviewers seem to have labeled it. The thing I loved about ROMANCING THE STONE was the way it lampooned situations that seem to be stock for every adventure film you've ever seen, and this tradition is carried, albeit weakly, into JEWEL OF THE NILE. It certainly lacks the great wit and originality of its predecessor (especially in the opening and closing scenes); but remember, ROMANCING THE STONE was an extremely good film, and while the sequel may pale in comparison, it still is a better-than-average attempt at tongue-in-cheek adventure (I liked it a good deal more than TEMPLE OF DOOM). I suspect the majority of credit goes to Kathleen Turner and Danny DeVito, who seem to play their roles with such relish that you find yourself smiling through even weak jokes. Also, DeVito's lines are some of the funniest in the film, and not at all crude (especially after seeing BEVERLY HILLS COP again). Michael Douglas still seems a bit mechanical for the character of Jack Colton; but the fact that he isn't played as some kind of crazed adventurer like I. Jones is at least a point in his favor. Also, whose idea was it to place the juggler-comedy team of the Flying Kamarazov Brothers in this film? They do very well as ghetto-blaster carrying revolutionaries.

Frankly, for \$2.50 on a Friday night, I found this to be solid entertainment. Give it a C-. By the way, for those of you who've seen it, two questions: is the fellow playing the Holy Man (i.e. the Jewel of the Nile) one of the Kamarazov Brothers? And is the fellow who plays the villain (Abdul?) in this film the same actor who played the heavy in ROMANCING THE STONE (the crazed Latino military officer?).

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Moriarty, aka Jeff Meyer

Subject: Brief review of OUT OF AFRICA
Path: mtuxo!houxm!vax135!cornell!uw-beaver!fluke!moriarty
Date: Mon, 6-Jan-86 16:26:48 EST

Frankly, any film which lasts two hours and forty minutes and doesn't make me look at my watch once is what I would call a critical success. Great photography, good music, engrossing dialogue, excellent acting by Streep, Robert Redford plays America's Intelligent Leading Man with his normal style (while Sylvester Stallone and Chuck Norris vie for America's Unintelligent Leading Man), and in general, you feel later as if you have read a good novel. People who need zany comedies and action pictures during the holidays may have problems with this. About the best description I can give of this film is that upon walking out of the theatre, I felt as if I had just had a good gourmet meal. I leave the amateur psychologists to figure THAT one out...

Moriarty, aka Jeff Meyer

Subject: Ran
Path: mtuxo!drutx!ihnp4!cbosgd!ukma!psuvm.bitnet!psuvax1!burdvax!sdcrcdf!jon
Date: Wed, 8-Jan-86 21:56:12 EST

I saw "Ran" the other night with several friends. I was somewhat wary of the movie, since the last Kurosawa I saw was "Kagemusha", and I felt it succeeded more on the directors reputation than on the content. I did enjoy "Ran" however; it is truly epic and a masterpiece of visualization. As for the content, I'm not convinced of its profundity. It is loosely based on "King Lear" and although it has been a long time since I read that play, I recall it as more of a vehicle for a actor to rant and rave across the stage than as a particularly compelling plot, but then I'm not a parent! The screenplay diverges in two notable ways. The "Great Lord" richly deserves his fate as recounted in encounters with his victims, one of whom is now his son's wife and is bent on vengeance for her family. Indeed, the actress's strong portrayal and the

structuring of the film around her story would suggest the film is really about her rather than the lord, except that so much screen time is devoted to him. "Ran" means chaos and the film is unremittingly dark. In fact, it reminds me of nothing so much as "Night of the Living Dead", an association undoubtably prompted by one of the battle scenes. I can not see what the director is saying beyond "War is hell". If the subject is at all appealing you should see it, otherwise ...