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Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
Club Notice - 2/10/89 -- Vol. 7, No. 33

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

02/22 LZ: SPHERE by Michael Crichton
03/08 MT: Space Colonies in Fact and Fiction (follow-up)
03/15 LZ: THE FINAL REFLECTION by John Ford (STAR TREK Novels)
04/05 LZ: The "Giants" Trilogy by James Hogan (Characterization in Hard SF)
04/12 MT: "Decorative Horror" and Clark Ashton Smith
04/26 LZ: MIRRORSHADES edited by Bruce Sterling (Anthologies)
05/10 MT: European Science Fiction (especially Stanislaw Lem)
05/17 LZ: LATHE OF HEAVEN by Ursula K. Leguin (The Nature of Reality)
06/07 LZ: ON STRANGER TIDES by Tim Powers (Swashbuckling SF)

 _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.

02/11   Science Fiction Association of Bergen County: Matt Costello
           (game reviewer for Davis Publications and horror author)
           (phone 201-933-2724 for details) (Saturday)
02/18   NJSFS New Jersey Science Fiction Society: TBA
           (phone 201-432-5965 for details)
03/04/89 APRICON X. NYC. GoH: Robert Sheckley; Info: Barnard-Columbia SFS,
 -03/05/89   313 Ferris-Booth Hall, Columbia Univ., NYC 10027. (212) 663-2240.
03/10/89 LUNACON. Tarrytown NY. GoH: Roger Zelazny; AGoH: Ron Walotsky;
 -03/12/89   EGoh: David Hartwell; FGoH: David Kyle. Info: Lunacon, Box 338,
           New York NY 10150; (609) 261-8316.
05/05/89 CONTRAPTION. MI. GoH: Mike Resnick; FGoHs: Mark & Evelyn Leeper.
 -05/07/89   Info: Diana Harlan Stein, 1325 Key West, Troy MI 48083.
08/31/89 NOREASCON III (47th World SF Con). MA. GoHs: Andre Norton, Ian & Betty
 -09/04/89   Ballantine; FGoH: The Stranger Club. Info: Noreascon Three,
           Box 46, MIT Branch P.O., Cambridge, MA 02139.

HO Chair: John Jetzt   HO 1E-525   834-1563 mtuxo!jetzt
LZ Chair: Rob Mitchell LZ 1B-306   576-6106 mtuxo!jrrt
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. The cyberpunk meeting held in Middletown on February 8 came up
with the following characteristics of cyberpunk:

  - It deals with the underbelly of society.

  - It deals with technologically advanced societies, especially
    dealing with computers.

  - It deals with a "global" society.

  - It has strong (technological) imagery, and pyrotechnic or
    electric prose.

  - It is often written in a non-monotonically-increasing time
    progression.

  - It deals with humanity transformed through technology (i.e.,
    personal technology rather than large-scale technology).

While not everyone agreed with all these characteristics, and not
everyone agreed that _a_l_l were necessary to make a work cyberpunk,
these seemed to form the core definition. (List generated by
Binayak Banerjee, Bob Halloran, Art Kaletzky, Dave Kemp, Evelyn
Leeper, Mark Leeper, and Dale Skran.)

Basic cyberpunk works recommended include (notations in parenthesis
indicate which SF Club Libraries have the book):

  - William Gibson's _N_e_u_r_o_m_a_n_c_e_r (HO, LZ), _C_o_u_n_t_Z_e_r_o (LZ), _M_o_n_a
    _L_i_s_a_O_v_e_r_d_r_i_v_e, and _B_u_r_n_i_n_g_C_h_r_o_m_e

- Bruce Sterling's _S_c_h_i_s_m_a_t_r_i_x

- Michael Swanwick's _V_a_c_u_u_m _F_l_o_w_e_r_s

- Walter Jon Williams' _H_a_r_d_w_i_r_e_d and _V_o_i_c_e _o_f _t_h_e _W_h_i_r_l_w_i_n_d

- Greg Bear's _B_l_o_o_d _M_u_s_i_c (HO, LZ)

- George Alec Effinger's _W_h_e_n _G_r_a_v_i_t_y _F_a_i_l_s

- Norman Spinrad's two columns "The Neuromantics" (_I_s_a_a_c _A_s_i_m_o_v'_s May 1986) and "Cyberpunk Revisited" (_I_s_a_a_c _A_s_i_m_o_v'_s March 1989) (both MT)

- Michael Swanwick's column "A User's Guide to the Postmoderns" (date and magazine unknown) (MT)

An interesting, though by no means basic, work is the cyberpunk issue of the scholarly journal _T_h_e _M_i_s_s_i_s_s_i_p_p_i _R_e_v_i_e_w (Number 47/48). To paraphrase someone, "You'll know when cyberpunk is dead when you can get a degree in it."

One of the major books discussed was John Brunner's _T_h_e _S_h_o_c_k_w_a_v_e _R_i_d_e_r, about a future in which a nation-wide computer network has vastly increased the mobility of most people--no bank accounts to transfer, change-of-address cards to send out, and almost everything is disposable anyway. As a result, most people change employers frequently; hardly anyone is "permed" (given tenure) at a company. Arthur Kaletzky said that when he read this book in the Seventies it got him interested in two things: computers and the RV lifestyle. (That's "RV" as in "resident visitor," or contractor, not "recreational vehicle," though the latter also indicates a certain mobility.) [-ecl]

2. I would like to discuss an aspect of the "Star Trek" universe that nobody likes to talk about...the mysterious missing mediocrity. I have just watched an episode in which there is a discussion of the merits of Dr. Pulaski. It is agreed that she is extremely good and extremely dedicated. We later find out that she

is the author of one of the fundamental medical source books. Now she is at least the fourth chief medical officer on some Enterprise and they have all been just super-special good doctors. The same episode has the transporter officer completely redesigning the transporter to a brand-new, almost miraculous function and with a little fine-tuning it works the first time. The Enterprise(s) always seem(s) to get the best captains, the best science officers, the best engineers, the best doctors. There are no C-students on the Enterprise, no earnest failures, no also-rans. You have a ship filled with the cream of the cream. Also, there are no real office politics obvious. These people seem to be the very best possible. Sure, there is the occasional bad crew member, but these bad eggs are _a_l_w_a_y_s good people misusing their talents.

Now, would Starfleet put all its best eggs in one vulnerable basket? There are whole fleets of starships needing crews. The crew of the Enterprise cannot be much better than typical. Where is Starfleet finding so many people who are at the top of their fields? Now you know and I know that no organization can hire the right people all the time. Certainly no military organization ever has. And you know that many people who are tops in their field are very competitive and self-serving. It is logical to assume that mediocrities and selfish people are getting into Starfleet and yet are mysteriously not in evidence. What is happening to people who are only the milk of the cream or the cream of the milk? What is happening to the vast numbers of mediocrities? By some sort of mutual conspiracy nobody even mentions them in the Star Trek universe. Something must be happening to them and nobody says a word. Now I ask you, is that the kind of world you'd want to live

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in? You might make it to serve on the starship Enterprise but if you are not as good as people like we see, if you don't meet the high standards, you would disappear and nobody would even talk about it. (I know I'd make it but I bet a lot of my best friends might not.) It gives me the willies just thinking about it. willies

3. As you can see we have scheduled several meetings, at both Middletown and Lincroft. By popular demand, the Middletown meetings will be held in the cafeteria, towards the windows--we

will try to have a sign on the table. Currently, _S_p_h_e_r_e, the "Giants" trilogy, and _L_a_t_h_e _o_f _H_e_a_v_e_n are available from the Lincroft SF Club Library.   I will try to purchase the remaining books as soon as possible. [-ecl]

                    Mark Leeper
                    MT 3E-433 957-5619

     Chaos often breeds life when order breeds habit.
                    -- Henry Adams

WINE OF THE DREAMERS by John D. MacDonald
      A book review by Frank Leisti
       Copyright 1989 Frank Leisti

    Although John D. MacDonald is better known for his men's adventure
series with Travis McGee, he has dabbled in the realm of science
fiction. This work was originally written back in 1951, shortly after
World War II.

    John portrays a world in which a small group of scientists are
working on a radical new design for a space ship. Rather than traveling
though space, its principle is to move though time. Because of the
pressure to succeed among so much unexplained madness with other space
going projects, this group of scientists is quite small - about 800
people or so. The chief administrator and his chief psychologist are on
their way to report to a hard-assed general who is in charge of
security. At this meeting, off the record, the general lays down his
rules which will protect him from any failings with the project. The
main point of the meeting is with one of the scientists who apparently
went insane and caused 4 months worth of damage to critical instruments.
The chief administrator takes on the liaison major that is assigned to
the project as per the generals demands. Unknown at this time is the
cause of a wave of madness that has been going on and been reported in
the news quite openly.

    We as readers find that on another world, a small group (1000 or so
people) are living in a scientific wonderland. They however, are not
knowledgeable about their circumstances. It appears that when a child
matures to adulthood, they are brought to a dream box. There are
settings on the box that will allow each user to dream of different
worlds. Their first three dreams must be about three different worlds.
Raul Kinson, a larger and stronger person, has been the first one to
question what they do and to explore and learn about his world. He has
taught himself to read various writings in manuals that he discovered.
When he has his dreams, he wonders if his dreams are about real worlds.
When dreaming, he learns to control the consciousness of the person who
he inhabits. Of course, he is really mentally traveling to three
different worlds. One world is a barbaric empire, the other is where
the people have learned to open their minds to each other - so that
there is peace on that world, the third is Earth. One rule that each
adult is taught to obey is to stop any attempts to move to space if they
dream that in their particular dream. There is another person on Raul's
planet - a girl who also questions and is taught by Raul - how to read
and learn. When she matures, she believes the dreams to be only dreams
and so makes each person she inhabits do more outlandish things.

    Eventually these events tie together and the secret project is
destroyed. So to is the chief administrator - who is disgraced and
eventually becomes a bum. The disaster of the space ship also affects

the female who now helps Raul get to one of six remaining ships to fly to Earth. However, Raul now needs the chief administrator's assistance to fly the ship. After working through the chief psychologist, Bard, the administrator is found and he helps out Raul. Unknown to both Raul and the girl, the people on their planet are ready to kill them for their blasphemy.

Bard convinces others to alert the authorities about the possibility of an alien space ship which may soon approach the earth. Government forces eventually arise to combat this hysteria in which people become Kinson watchers. The ending brings forth a tying-in of all of the loose parts.

This book, I found was quite enjoyable to read. It is evident that the main statement presented here is that man/woman is not really responsible for such insane acts and violence as we currently have. An easy solution to all of our violence and major accidents. My question from this book is - even if this was true and someone/something could temporarily take over our minds and bodies, how could we tell the difference if we did not experience it directly? Even if we experienced it directly, what would be our explanation of what happened?

This is a very simple science fiction story - one of many from the same time period. The basis is interesting, however, characters are not really developed and the underlying basis for such madness is not explored.

THE SHOCKWAVE RIDER by John Brunner
        A book review by Jerry Ryan

Synopsis: Classic SF novel about the effects of future shock, and other
not-so-nice features of the Information Age. _T_h_e _S_h_o_c_k_w_a_v_e _R_i_d_e_r
includes the first ever reference to computer tapeworms. The hero is a
"hacker" (in the modern media's usage of the word) who puts tapeworms to
some interesting uses. A bit preachy in spots, but overall a great
read. +3 on the famous -4 to +4 scale.

Some books have to be read twice.

The first time I read John Brunner's _ T_ h_ e _ S_ h_ o_ c_ k_ w_ a_ v_ e _ R_ i_ d_ e_ r,
the book was
    brand new (1975), I was a naive high school kid, and I came away from
    the book remembering something along the lines of "OK action but it
    dragged in the middle." I decided to take advantage of the "free book
    if you review it" offer made by The MT Void, to see how well memory
    served. Turns out it didn't serve too well. Perhaps I'm much more
    cynical now, but I found Brunner's treatment of some of his central
    topics (like how much we should trust government and how important it is
    to ensure and preserve personal freedom in the information age) so on
    the money that I found myself reading passages out loud to anyone at
    home who would listen.

The story revolves around the life and times of Nickie Haflinger. It's
set in the not-so-distant future, in which connectivity of computer

systems throughout the land is taken to the nth degree. In fact, a
suitably skilled user can get at just about anything in the network from
a phone. Nickie is just such a user: he is to the computer net what the
prodigy Mozart was to music, and with a flick of the fingers he can do
just about anything. Nickie has a 4GH code, which he uses to great
advantage. This code is a latter-day superuser password to the net.
Network directives headed by such a code are allowed just about every
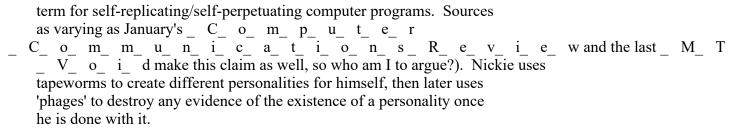privilege.

How Nickie gets his hands on his code is a story in itself. The
government runs a think tank called Tarnover, which (among other things)
has educated Nickie. He discovers the sort of work that is being done
at Tarnover, and deduces the plans that the government has for
Tarnover's graduates. Along the way he also deduces the existence of,
and eventually discovers the reality of, the high-powered 4GH codes. He
appropriates one for himself and escapes from Tarnover.

The existence of these powerful codes, their powers in the network and
over the lives of the network users, are an important part of the world
that Brunner has created in _ T_ h_ e_ S_ h_ o_ c_ k_ w_ a_ v_ e_ R_ i_ d_ e_ r. In the
acknowledgement, Brunner indicates that he has snatched the scenario for
his world out of Alvin Toffler's nightmares (_ F_ u_ t_ u_ r_ e_ S_ h_ o_ c_ k is
acknowledged as the inspiration for the story, and is the source for the
title's Shockwave that Nickie is Riding). This world changes so swiftly

- 2 -

that most of its inhabitants are using tranquilizers just to cope from
day to day. The "plug-in lifestyle" has evolved to deal with the rapid
changes: in theory, one can pick up from one job, travel across
country, and plug into the same social structure and lifestyle without
missing a beat. In practice, those living the plug-in lifestyle become
even more alienated from a world with no solid place to drop anchor.
Combined with widespread corruption and misappropriation of information
by government agencies and corporations that are linked to the net,
Brunner's characters live a grim existence. It's a world made all the
more chilling by the recognizable pieces of today that peek out at the
reader.

Nickie escapes from Tarnover to use his talents, helped by his 4GH code,
to try and change all this. His method is running the network using
"tapeworms." (By the way, Brunner is credited with originating this

term for self-replicating/self-perpetuating computer programs. Sources
as varying as January's _ C_ o_ m_ p_ u_ t_ e_ r
_ C_ o_ m_ m_ u_ n_ i_ c_ a_ t_ i_ o_ n_ s_ R_ e_ v_ i_ e_ w and the last _ M_ T
_ V_ o_ i_ d make this claim as well, so who am I to argue?). Nickie uses
tapeworms to create different personalities for himself, then later uses
'phages' to destroy any evidence of the existence of a personality once
he is done with it.

The book starts out with Nickie's interrogation after his recapture by
Tarnover after a six-year absence. During the interrogation, which
takes about two-thirds of the book, flashbacks are used to tell us about
Nickie, his talents, and the various personas that he has assumed. We
learn about how and why he first escaped from Tarnover, how he was
recaptured, and what motivates him to do what he's done.

Nickie manages to escape (again) from Tarnover. He makes his way to
Hearing Aid, a group that he befriended just before his capture, that
runs what amounts to a telephone confessional service. With their help,
he proceeds to fight the corruption and oppression perpetrated by the
government and corporate misusers of the net.

It is the philosophical discourse between Nickie and his interrogator
that is the low point of the book; at times Brunner makes his points in
a somewhat heavy-handed way. However, the richness of the characters
and the fine attention to detail that he has used in creating his world
more that make up for this slow spot.

Nickie's ultimate success in fighting his dehumanizing world comes from
recognizing that he can't go it alone. His "cause" comes into focus for
him when he finds a more personal reason for his fight: as he discovers
his ability to love, he realizes just how bad the world he lives in is,
and how much it needs the change that he can bring.

So in case my opinion hasn't come through clearly enough: _ T_ h_ e_ S_ h_ o_ c_ k_ w_ a_ v_ e
_ R_ i_ d_ e_ r is a great book. It's well worth a read... maybe even a reread!.

EXTRA(ORDINARY) PEOPLE
Women's Press, 1985 (c1984), ISBN 0-7043-3950-1, L1.95 ($3.95)

This collection of five shorter pieces by Russ includes the novella
"Souls" which won the Hugo for 1982 and was nominated for the Nebula and
the novella "The Mystery of the Young Gentleman," also nominated for the
Nebula for 1982. The premise is that these are stories told by a tutor
to a "schoolkid" about how the world was (or wasn't saved). "Souls"
tells of an abbey invaded by Vikings and of the abbess who protects it
as best she can. "The Mystery of the Young Gentleman" is the story of a
pair of travelers in Edwardian (?) times who aren't quite what they
seem. "Bodies" is about a future utopia; "What Did You Do During the
Revolution, Grandma?" is a story of parallel worlds where cause and
effect are not always in force. (It seemed vaguely reminiscent of _ T_ h_ e
_ P_ r_ i_ n_ c_ e_ s_ s_ B_ r_ i_ d_ e, at least in the naming of the characters.) "Everyday
Depressions" is on the surface the story of an Eighteenth (or is it
Nineteenth?) Century female author and her problems, but seems to be
more the telling of Russ's view of the plight of females and female
authors in any age. All the stories are well-written and worth
collecting. It is unfortunate that no American publisher seems to want
to publish Russ--the only books by her most bookstores have are her
earlier novels. That the only way to get these stories is from a
British publisher is a pity. (I didn't notice until after I bought the
book that it was published by "The Women's Press," which has printed, as
Mark pointed out, a rather sexist charter printed in the front of the
book. So it's not entirely clear whether Russ prefers that her works be
published by The Women's Press rather than Ace or New American Library
or whether the choice was made by the publishers.)

HER ALIBI
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
Copyright 1989 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: Bruce Beresford (_ B_ r_ e_ a_ k_ e_ r_ M_ o_ r_ a_ n_ t, _ T_ e_ n_ d_ e_ r_ M_ e_ r_ c_ i_ e_ s) turns his hand to a light comedy-mystery whose most severe false steps are when it strays into slapstick. The mystery is predictable. Rating: +1.

Australian director Bruce Beresford is not really someone known for light comedy. The major films he is known for are _ D_ o_ n'_ s_ P_ a_ r_ t_ y (1976), _ T_ h_ e_ M_ o_ n_ e_ y_ M_ o_ v_ e_ r_ s (1978), _ B_ r_ e_ a_ k_ e_ r _ M_ o_ r_ a_ n_ t (1980), and _ T_ e_ n_ d_ e_ r_ M_ e_ r_ c_ i_ e_ s (1982). That is a pretty somber set of films with the possible exception of parts of _ D_ o_ n'_ s_ P_ a_ r_ t_ y. He certainly is not the first director you would expect to see doing a light, romantic comedy-mystery, but that is just what he is doing in _ H_ e_ r_ A_ l_ i_ b_ i.

  _ H_ e_ r_ A_ l_ i_ b_ i does not actually start as a light comedy. The police find a murder victim stabbed to death with a pair of scissors and Frank Polito (played by James Farentino) is investigating. We are also introduced to Philip Blackwood (played by Tom Selleck), a mystery writer with a series of eight or so popular mysteries to his name. And eight was about the number of stories he had to tell. For four years he has been trying to squeeze out another without success. Then he sees Nina, a beautiful Romanian woman on trial for murder, and decides to get involved by telling the police that she was with him at the time of the murder. (Do _ n_ o_ t try this trick at home, boys and girls.) Polito knows he is lying and warns him that if she murders Blackwood, the alibi can never be questioned. Blackwood convinces Nina to stay at his house but he is torn between infatuation and suspicion.

Nina is played by the svelte Paulina Porizkova, who also played the young lover in _ T_ h_ e_ U_ n_ b_ e_ a_ r_ a_ b_ l_ e_ L_ i_ g_ h_ t_ n_ e_ s_ s _ o_ f_ B_ e_ i_ n_ g. _ H_ e_ r_ A_ l_ i_ b_ i also features several familiar actors in roles that less familiar actors could have easily filled. But it is still enjoyable to see the likes of the durable William Daniels (_ T_ h_ e_ G_ r_ a_ d_ u_ a_ t_ e. television's _ C_ a_ p_ t_ a_ i_ n_ N_ e_ m_ o), Tess Harper, Joan Copeland, and the ever-sinister Hurd Hatfield (_ T_ h_ e _ P_ i_ c_ t_ u_ r_ e_ o_ f_ D_ o_ r_ i_ a_ n_ G_ r_ a_ y).

Beresford has a deft hand with drama but his occasional lapses into

slapstick undermine the mood of the film and are neither likable nor
believable. Colin Higgins' transitions in the comparable _ F_ o_ u_ l_ P_ l_ a_ y were
handled much more smoothly. Beresford does manage to turn an impromptu
haircut into an extremely sensual sequence which is a little
surprising--considering haircuts, I mean. Another and unfortunately
larger sequence involving a cat is merely a dramatization of an old
joke.

   _ H_ e_ r_ A_ l_ i_ b_ i is a pleasant lightweight piece of entertainment. Rate
it a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

   (FYI: One of my best friends is Romanian. The Romanian spoken in
this film has the right words but is still barely recognizable as
Romanian.)