



it up on the fly during brainstorming for potential meeting topics). Perhaps "ornate macabre" captures this potential genre more accurately. Other works which sort of fit in (you decide!) are Jack Vance's D\_y\_i\_n\_g\_E\_a\_r\_t\_h stories, Stuart Gordon's T\_h\_r\_e\_e\_E\_y\_e\_s, Leigh Brackett's G\_i\_n\_g\_e\_r\_S\_t\_a\_r and other novels, and the Cthulhu

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stories (although those might be more horrible and less decorative).

What is decorative horror? Although I think to discuss it now would be to defeat the purpose of the meeting, a couple of suggestions might be appropriate to grease the wheels of your mental processes.

Firstly, it's a great way to improve your vocabulary. Each story is jam-packed with opportunities to keep you dictionary-hopping. Pustular odalisques lounging about in crepuscular catafalques will truly make you appreciate how rich English can be.

Although often dismal and quirky, the stories themselves have a unique identity that wail for attention. Who could resist the idea of cochineal ichors dripping lugubriously as antiphonal threnodies echo through the moldy carcasses of antique civilizations? Exotic settings and arcane situations will either enchant you or put you right to sleep.

By the way, I don't want to sound like I think that this stuff is great and exciting reading. I just think that it has a definite style and that it's potentially discussable (a little scorn insurance there). If you're seeking inner peace and the seven steps to psychosomatic enlightenment you'd better stick to cyberpunk.

2. A couple of reminders: P\_o\_s\_e\_i\_d\_o\_n\_i\_s, a collection of short stories by Clark Ashton Smith, is available from the Middletown science fiction library in my office, and we will be meeting back towards to windows in the cafeteria (look for the sign!). [-ecl]

3. You never actually know whom to believe. I generally consider that PBS stations and the Arts and Entertainment channel are

usually fairly credible. But their capability seems to fail them as they get away from their pre-recorded programming. Then they start making statements either incredibly obvious or of pomposity that would make a Roman emperor blush. They will take a program about nature that normally gets its facts fairly right, but then end it by saying, "'Nature' is made possible by a grant from the Acme Hotdog Corporation." Oh, yeah? What did we have before the Acme Hotdog Corporation was founded? Anything?

Other times you will hear things like, "'Our Century' will continue in a moment." When I hear this one I always turn to the window, expecting to see things frozen or something. I suppose it is perfectly true, but I generally find it is going on even in the break.

Occasionally in a fit of honesty you hear, "'Mystery' is made possible by a grant from Mobil Oil." It certainly was made

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possible during the energy crisis. Were they holding on to vast reserves they haven't told us about? But I find it odd that they take a moment like this to make the admission.

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Images are not arguments, rarely even lead to proof, but the mind craves them, and, of late more than ever, the keenest experimenters find twenty images better than one, especially if contradictory; since the human mind has already learned to deal in contradictions.

-- Henry Adams

THE VISITORS by Clifford D. Simak  
A book review by Kenneth W. Howard  
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Capsule review: Some very interesting ideas with  
anachronistic characters and an unsatisfying ending. Read  
W\_a\_y\_S\_t\_a\_t\_i\_o\_n.

I picked up this 1979 book by Clifford Simak at the Middletown Library book sale because I had read W\_a\_y\_S\_t\_a\_t\_i\_o\_n several years ago and had heard other good things about the author.

The premise, that visitors from space could be so alien that when they came to earth they would mostly ignore us, is intriguing. Mr. Simak does well in his portrayal of the impact of this treatment. The visitors go about their own interests, harm almost no one, and generally frustrate the government. Even crack-pots get little benefit from their presence.

The main disappointing part of the book lies in the characters. They are well drawn, but are like no one I can imagine. They are what might result if you projected the 1950s to our technological level (a space station and shuttles are mentioned). The interaction of the two main characters, and the role the woman reporter plays in her job, is reminiscent of the movie H\_i\_s\_G\_i\_r\_l\_F\_r\_i\_d\_a\_y with Rosalind Russell and Cary Grant. I couldn't believe in these people and, ultimately, the story.

A second disappointment was the ending of the story. Mr. Simak seems to have simply stopped writing. Several interesting threads are not developed, and no resolution is offered. I can accept the idea that a story should not be "tied-up in a neat package", but not developing the ideas presented is unsatisfactory.

On the whole, I cannot recommend this book. If you want to appreciate this author's respectable talent, read W\_a\_y\_S\_t\_a\_t\_i\_o\_n.

PERCHANCE by Michael Kurland  
A book review by Frank R. Leisti  
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"The Chronicles of Elsewhen," entitled P\_e\_r\_c\_h\_a\_n\_c\_e by Michael Kurland, ties together the travels between different universes -- in a sense -- parallel universes which diverge from common points where a decision may have been of such importance as to diverge the universes from each other. There are two stories tied together as diverse people roam and exploit the worlds of the Paraverse. One civilization, the Overline, exploits these various worlds for much of the resources available for them. These cautious people have banded together to create a type of police force which will close down worlds rather than let a civilization have the secret of the Maberippe Drive which allowed transfer from one parallel world to another. In exploring the particular strands of universe around their own, the people of Overline found out that their neighbour universes were non-existent.

The other civilization that is tied to is one of an old earth where United States used direct current for electricity and only electric cars are available. In this civilization, slavery is still in force -- even from Philadelphia to New York. In Manhattan, a Dr. Faineworth has come across a young girl who has shown up naked, with no memory and only dreams as nightmares. She also has a disturbing ability to disappear from locked rooms, leaving the clothes that she was wearing. Dr. Faineworth, in his search for answers enlists the name of an apprentice (aka slave) of Delbit Quint, who has the exact matching pattern of the young girl's brain waves. With Delbit's assistance aided by machines of the doctor's design, Delbit is able to visit the girl's nightmares. They call the young girl, Exxa and she disappears when the doctor attempts to show her to Delbit after he arrived from Philadelphia.

As a young man, Delbit is enchanted by Exxa and works with Dr. Faineworth to uncover the horror of her nightmares. With the equipment, Delbit discovers that he can be seen by the girl in her dreams/nightmares. This highly personal relationship takes an unexpected turn when apparent enemies raid the clinic and Exxa vanishes taking Delbit with her. Of course, Exxa leaves behind her clothes when she and Delbit arrive in a forest on another parallel world. Exploring this world, they come upon tribesmen in boats along the Hudson River and take them upstream to their village. Unfortunately, the village is attacked and both Delbit and Exxa are taken prisoner. Their journey as prisoners comes to a separating end when Exxa disappears again just as she was about to be raped and Delbit is rescued by an army called from the Overline. An intelligence officer hearing Delbit's story alerts the Preceptor of the Overline who personally assists Delbit in rescuing Exxa from Delbit's world and the enemies that wish to take her.

Upon restoring Exxa's memory on Overline, a subtle return to the circumstances of her disappearance uncovers a plot against Exxa's family by other who have the natural ability to pass across parallel worlds. The climax ties all the loose ends together for the conclusion and everyone is happy -- except for Delbit.

I enjoy stories of alternate universes and this author's description of the twisting and multiple strands that form from decisions creates visual images that almost seem alive. The story blends excellent realism with the necessary surprises that will keep a reader off balance in following the entire story as it is being told. The tie-ins between the numerous civilizations are nicely tied together before the end. I feel that the society in which the Overline people live should not be as conservative as depicted, however, as they have the choice of products and services from numerous worlds. Another aspect that the author did not explore is that of splitting a world when an outsider makes a decision. For example, the enemy of Exxa, discovering that she has escaped to another world burn that current world of Manhattan so that when she returns, she will be very easy to spot naked amongst the rubble. However, as this is a very important decision or act -- should not the world have split into another universe stream where Manhattan would not be burned? And if split, how does Exxa with her ability know which world to enter? I found the story quite enchanting in its storytelling and would recommend it to others who love alternate universe stories.

SORCEROR'S SON by Phyllis Eisenstein  
A book review by Frank R. Leisti  
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The worlds of sorcerers and sorceresses lie deep away from the realm of mankind. Yet these sorcerers/sorceresses arise from human stock. They suffer from our petty emotions and hunger for that which they can not have. Power in abundance they have, use it wisely, they do not. This is the story of the struggle in the midst of emotions and hunger. This story entwines the lives of two such people, Smada Rezhik and Delivev Ormoru. Smada is sorcerer of demons (fire demons), and has been refused marriage with Delivev, a sorceress who controls those who weave or spin thread. Thus ivy, spiders, snakes, clothing, and such are under her control. Smada, enraged at his proposal fashions his principle fire demon, Gildrum into a young man -- a knight to woo Delivev and get her pregnant so that her powers weakened by the pregnancy would not detect his efforts to make a gold chain mail vest to protect him from her magic. Gildrum uses the sperm of Smada and succeeds. Yet to what cost for this fire demon? Gildrum appears to fall in love with Delivev, more so when she keeps the child to term rather than aborting the babe. We see her ability to view the world through any spider web, so she knows what goes on in the world.

The child, named Cray grows quickly and misses his father. His mother had created a tapestry of Mellor (as Gildrum was known to her) and Cray becomes enchanted with the idea of becoming a knight. As a

young boy he leaves his mother's castle and ventures to the nearest kingdom in search of a sword and armour. This experience with others shows his isolation more vividly as he negotiates with the king about the sword and armour. The king, however, is more afraid of Delivev and possible poachers that might be venturing in the woods near her home. Cray returns home and begins practicing with the sword and armour and develops into a young man. Finally he decides to search out his father from the scant knowledge that his mother has. On his journey, Gildrum secretly assists him with food and sees how he has developed. Although Gildrum is pledged to Smada, he steals moments to view Delivev and Cray.

The journey continues and Cray comes across a beggar, Sepwin, who because he has eyes of different colours is viewed as having the evil eye. Cray who lacks prejudice assists Sepwin in obtaining a horse and fighting of villagers who attempt to kill Sepwin. Cray's progress to find his father is monitored both by Gildrum and Delivev. Cray reports certain events back to his mother through the use of the spider's webs. His spiders are under his control and he has the ability to control their webs. His search for his father brings sorrow in finding a grave where his father lies killed by some black knight. (This story was set up by Gildrum long ago in case Delivev sought after him.) Finding only sorrow, Cray calls to his mother for advice and she directs him to the Seer. Arriving at the Seer's house, she directs him to where the shield

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and sword of his father came from. They journey quickly to arrive before winter, warned of danger on the way. Both Cray and Sepwin fight the bandits that the Seer warned them of and make their way over the mountain to the fortress of the East March. There they discover that the equipment was stolen many years ago. Cray is devastated about this news of his father. While trapped by winter, he makes use of his time to learn knighthood and swordsmanship.

In spring, Cray has a journey back to the Seer for her advice. Even though the adventures of the journey have some appeal to him and his abilities, the shock of her advice is too much. His mother has wanted him to be a sorcerer, yet he took up knighthood to be like his father. The journey to truth, and his quest to know about his father turns him to look for sorcery as he discovered that the grave did not contain any bones. It too was a lie. The Seer puts out inquiries and offers Cray for apprenticeship with sorcerers of demons. Gildrum

suggests to Smada that he instruct Cray and to discourage him from this as Smada believes that Cray is in league with his mother to destroy him. Cray accepts the apprenticeship and its conditions and begins a long study with failures along the way. Smada, begins to pass off teaching about summoning the demons to Gildrum as he does not want to relate with Cray at all. Gildrum exposes Smada's plan to discourage Cray from sorcery and so Cray begins to really learn from Gildrum. Finally he calls forth a small fire demon and creates a shape for him. This fire demon is instructed to find out who his father is. When Cray learns that his father is Smada, he can not believe it. Eventually he realizes that it was Gildrum who carried Smada's seed to Delivev. Finally in disgust, he leaves the apprenticeship. Smada then orders Gildrum to ensure that Cray will have no new sorcerer to instruct him.

Gildrum, obeying the letter of the command spirits Cray away to the land of the demons where an air demon will assist and supply Cray with the materials that he needs to learn to have enough demons to free Gildrum from Smada. Time is limited in that soon, Smada commands his fire demons to attack Delivev and she retaliates. Cray, using demons as friends rather than as servants assists his mother and is forced into a showdown with his father.

This story was quite enhancing and wove a spell of interest from beginning to end. The struggle of Cray to find his father reminded me of the impact of \_ R\_ o\_ o\_ t\_ s, the quest for one's ancestry. The desires and hopes for love and one's ideals play a very important part in this story. The story is well weaved in the abilities and interactions necessary when one is a searcher of knowledge and power. I enjoyed this storytelling and found it hard to put the book down before finishing it.