

HOUSE OF GAMES stars Lindsay Crouse and Joe Mantegna. THINGS CHANGE stars Don Ameche and Joe Mantegna. Mamet wrote both screenplays, though Shel Silverstein co-authored THINGS CHANGE. What are they about? They are each about 100 minutes long. That's

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already telling you too much. Scheuer give both films three stars out of four. Maltin gives three stars to HOUSE OF GAMES and does not list THINGS CHANGE.

2. You may have noticed a slight decline in the number of film reviews that have shown up in the notice of late. I have cut down for the sake of honesty in my reviews. Not every time that I go to the movie can I honestly review the film. Why not? Well, apparently the word is out about me, at least at some of the local theatres. It works like this: You may have noticed that restaurant critics rarely put their pictures in their reviews--and for very good reason. When a restaurant knows they are critics all of a sudden the quality of the food goes up. It's only natural; they want to make a good impression. So restaurant reviewers tend to travel incognito to avoid this problem. Well, unfortunately a number of local theatres seem to have found out that I review films and have been trying to impress me with their films. It's like when I went to see R_a_m_b_o_I_I_I--you may have noticed I did not review it. Well, they roll the credits and I'm all set for a rip-roaring shoot/flame/blow-'em-up and the scene cuts to a paperweight, a glass ball with a little house and fake snow falling. And a voice (not Stallone's) whispers, "Rosebud," and lets the paperweight fall. I mean, it was a great film, but not the typical experience of someone going to see R_a_m_b_o_I_I_I.

3. Nick Sauer sent in the following response to Mark Leeper's comments on Nick's comments on L_a_t_h_e_o_f_H_e_a_v_e_n:

In response to Mark's comments on my article I would first like to commend Mark on an excellent article. The points that Mark makes are all completely accurate and very scientifically correct. Unfortunately, they are not really applicable to the point I was originally trying to make. The paragraph in question seems to be:

"This concept was the fact that by observing a system you changed it. More specifically, for sub-atomic particles the act of measuring the particle changed it from its natural state. This is because a second particle must be made to collide with the first particle and then be collected to acquire the desired information gathered about the first particle. Unfortunately, this action throws the first particle out of its original state. Thus, we are in effect observing a particle different from what it was before we came along and measured it."

The above paragraph is true only for measurements made on sub-atomic particles. I had thought that the article clearly stated this but, apparently it did not (as Mark's article seems to indicate). So, I will re-explain what was meant in the above paragraph.

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Sub-atomic (and atomic) particles are well beyond the range of our normal senses. In order to acquire any information about them we must use high magnetic fields or force another particle to collide with them. Therefore, in order to measure a particle we must subject it to one of these two information gathering techniques. Once the particle is subjected to one of these forms of measurement we can begin to gather information about it. However, the information that we gather on the particle is collected AFTER the particle has either been exposed to the magnetic field or hit with another particle. Thus, the measurements we are acquiring on the particle are NOT for the particle in its regular state of existence. Instead, the information we have gathered is for a particle in a high magnetic field or after a collision with particle X. This was the point I was trying to make in the above paragraph and, was the point I found so frustrating.

Ironically enough, as I was writing the original version of the review I just knew that someone was going to misinterpret what was stated in it. So, I took great pains to word it as carefully as possible and had several people proofread it for content. Oh well, the best laid plans.... [-njs]

Mark Leeper
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A time will come when this Universe and Nature itself will be extinguished... Of the entire world and of the vicissitudes and calamities of all created things there will remain not a single trace, but a naked silence and a most profound stillness will fill the immensity of space. And so before ever it has uttered or understood, this admirable and fearful secret of universal existence will be obliterated and lost.

-- Count Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837)

THE ALIEN TRACE, by H. M. Major
Signet, 1984, ISBN 0-451-13063-4, \$2.95
TIME TWISTER, by H. M. Major
Signet, 1984, ISBN 0-451-13283-1, \$2.95
Book reviews by George F. MacLachlan
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Only about one third of the books that I read each year are Science Fiction. This allows me to narrow in on stories that are nominated for

Hugo and Nebula awards as well as those that come highly recommended. The SF I find most enjoyable are works that contain at least one or two new ideas or concepts that are intriguing and allow one's imagination to churn over. Unfortunately, these stories by H. M. Major don't satisfy any of the above criteria.

In past issues of the M_T_V_o_i_d, I have read reviews of books that have been characterized as "pulp." I strongly suspect that the "Alien Trace" series (these first two are only the beginning) fits well into that category. The story begins on the planet Mehira, home world of a totally empathic race. The Mehirans empathic nature allowed them to evolve away from aggressive, violent behavior because they each experienced other's feelings as they would their own. Major also chose to endow the Mehirans with long tails. The only use for these appears to be in expanding the variety of erotic possibilities in the explicit sexual scenes that Major seems obligated to put in about every 15 to 20 pages or so.

The story line follows the adventures of Cord the Catcher. Catchers are essentially bounty hunters who use assorted gadgetry to track and monitor their suspects. Cord's empathic abilities are an asset in the bounty hunting business, especially when pitted against aliens who are unaware of his ability. Physically, Cord is somewhat of a cross between Mr. Spock and Arnold Schwarzenegger (if you believe the cover art and associated narrative). Intellectually he comes up somewhere between James Bond and Mike Hammer.

Major really doesn't develop the Mehiran culture very well and what little he does tell us (in the first volume) leaves too many obvious questions unanswered. We learn a little about Cord's profession as a Catcher before he begins his adventure of tracking down an alien, shape-changing killer. This mission is supposed to be the thread that transcends the multiple volumes of this series, but somehow manages to get totally sidetracked in the second volume (T_i_m_e_T_w_i_s_t_e_r).

I agreed to review this pair of books because of my interest in how various authors deal with time travel. Major adds nothing new to this subject area and only uses time travel as a minor mechanism in advancing his story. These books are a very easy read, but the dialogue (especially in the first volume) often seemed contrived. The characters are not developed well and I found myself not caring particularly what happened to them. I'm not sure that I'd recommend them except as a light read, given that nothing better was at hand.

THE MUMMY, OR RAMSES THE DAMNED by Anne Rice
Ballantine, 1989, ISBN 0-345-36000-1, \$11.95.

A book review by Mark R. Leeper
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There have been many strange religions of ancient man. The majority have been for the most part forgotten. yet the religion of ancient Egypt has not. Modern Egypt has a large industry just serving tourists who want to come to see the relics of its ancient religion. The mysticism of ancient Egypt, seemingly so different from modern religions, has captured the public's imagination. And perhaps no single aspect of the religion has so captured modern people's imagination as stories of mummies whose remains have apparently mystically been able to survive the ravages of time. Where our corpses decompose within months of being buried, you can still see facial and body features of Egyptians dead for three thousand years. Horror writers have taken things a step further, asking, if the remains can be preserved for so long, is it possible to bring life back to these bodies?

Revived mummy stories were around before the opening of Tutankhamen's tomb, but they were a relatively rare subject for horror. The coincidental deaths of several of the people involved in the opening of that tomb gave rise to wild newspaper stories and inspired a horror film-- T_h_e_M_u_m_m_y, which starred Boris Karloff. It was actually a fairly good story and one that was well-grounded in ancient Egyptian mythology. It inspired two series of horror films, one produced by Universal Pictures in the 1930s and 1940s, and one produced by Hammer Films in the 1960s and 1970s. None of them were as authentic to the myth as was the original Boris Karloff film.

No doubt inspired by the films, short story writers had often toyed with the plot device of walking mummies, but other than novelizations of films, to the best of my knowledge there has not been a novel about a revived mummy until now.

New Orleans writer Anne Rice is best known for her vampire novels:

I_n_t_e_r_v_i_e_w_w_i_t_h_t_h_e_V_a_m_p_i_r_e, T_h_e_V_a_m_p_i_r_e_L_e_s_t_a_t, and Q_u_e_e_n_o_f_t_h_e_D_a_m_n_e_d.

I have read only the first of these, but I enjoyed it a great deal and I have had good reports of the others so I had very high hopes and expectations when I saw that she had written a novel T_h_e_M_u_m_m_y_o_r_R_a_m_s_e_s_t_h_e_D_a_m_n_e_d.

Unfortunately, T_h_e_M_u_m_m_y is a disappointment. Not that it is a bad novel--at times it is fun--but while I_n_t_e_r_v_i_e_w_w_i_t_h_t_h_e_V_a_m_p_i_r_e was a fascinating exercise that really put the reader inside the mind and appetites of a vampire, T_h_e_M_u_m_m_y puts the reader only in some very familiar situations. Ramses, rather than being the frightful ghoul of some baroque tomb, becomes more the romantic lead of the novel. Once released again, alive by virtue of an immortality elixir (the same idea

used in lesser mummy movies), he inflates to his former handsome self and almost immediately understands and speaks English. He is not at all bewildered by Twentieth Century life. He is an incredibly quick study. He is sort of the handsome stranger who hides very well the secret that he is really 3000 years old. I, in fact, see in him everything I don't like about Chelsea Quinn Yarbro's vampire, Saint-Germain.

Where Rice did such a good job of making us see the monster's point of view in I_n_t_e_r_v_i_e_w_w_i_t_h_t_h_e_V_a_m_p_i_r_e, she totally falls flat in T_h_e_M_u_m_m_y. Ramses is simply too interesting a concept to turn into a romantic hero. Much of the book becomes a romance novel with a rather weak murder plot. Ramses, though it is never actually said, is Ramses II, who ruled Egypt until he was an old man and must have appeared so. Hence the elixir must have done more than just bestow immortality; it must have also restored his youth. That is an aspect that Rice never actually mentions.

The plot has Ramses reviving his lost love more than a millenium his junior--Cleopatra. (With a few hundred pages more I am sure Rice could have worked Napoleon Bonaparte and Abraham Lincoln into the plot too--maybe they will be along later in the series.) Cleopatra could have brought more interest to the story in that she at least stays a monster rather than becoming a love interest, but we rarely see the world from her eyes and she too is entirely too much a quick study of so alien a culture.

I found out after I finished the book that it was to be the basis of a television movie. Or perhaps Rice based it on her own screenplay. In any case, at \$11.95 it is novelization-level writing. Be warned.

Guest of Honor Speech at Contraption
Comments by Mark R. Leeper
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[Preliminary knowledge: George Laskowski has taken the name of Lan when he does science-fiction-related activity, which includes publishing an amateur magazine, L_a_n'_s_L_a_n_t_e_r_n. Robert Bloch is the author of P_s_y_c_h_o and many horror stories. Mike Resnick, the Professional Guest of Honor, is the author of I_v_o_r_y and several other science fiction works, many having to do with Africa.]

Well, I will try to make this speech quickly so Mr. Resnick can get to his next appointment. As you can see, I will be delivering the speech from these blue index cards. My memory is short and without these cards to keep me on track I might lose my way and ramble into something meaningful. Or I might forget to tell some really useful lie.

No Fan Guest of Honor speech is complete without thanking the con committee and the Contraption committee has been really terrific to us. I want to thank Lan, to whom I am sure being thanked is no novelty. I want to thank the Steins, whom I did not know 48 hours ago and who now treat us like old friends. But I particularly want to thank Rich Tucholka. Often I have felt like I have been playing one of role-playing games. Something wonderful happens and Rich was somehow behind it, from the time he stood three hours in line so we could get tickets

to the premier of C l o s e E n c o u n t e r s o f t h e
T h i r d K i n d to his choosing me
for Fan Guest of Honor for Novacon. I suspect he and Lan were behind my
choice this time.

I think my choice this time as Fan Guest of Honor is a recognition
of the many and varied services to Michigan fandom that I have never
rendered. Way back I am credited with introducing Lan to fandom. In
those days he was erroneously as George Laskowski. In Michigan fandom
claiming to be the first to bring Lan and fandom together is a little
like claiming to be the first to bring hydrogen and oxygen together. It
took very little effort. They seemed to be made for each other. The
result was a great release of energy. And if we really were the first,
it sure must have been a long time ago.

In the eleven and a half years since we left Detroit, it seems to
me I have done very little for Michigan fandom. I said "yes" to Lan.
You can get into an awful lot of trouble by saying yes. I wouldn't be
making a fool of myself now if I hadn't said yes. In this case what I
had said was no, I probably did not have the time to write for L a n' s
L a n t e r n but yes, he could reprint anything he wanted from the stuff I
had already written. And in the interim I h a v e written only two items
for L a n' s L a n t e r n. The first was a sort of quibbling, petty self-
defense I wrote when I had said something stupid and had been corrected
by Robert Bloch. The other was a sort of quibbling, petty self-defense

I wrote when I had said something stupid and had been corrected by Mike
Resnick. In my youth my goal had been to write a sort of quibbling,
petty self-defense which was to be written when I had been corrected by
Ernest Hemingway. But since he had had the good sense to die before
getting embroiled in one of my arguments, I have had to make do with the
material available. [Resnick's response to this was, "You're in the big
time now, buddy."]

My writing is best known, I think, in a circle of readers almost
entirely disjoint from Michigan fandom. My writings--mostly the same
writings--can be found on an electronic bulletin board known as the UNIX
Usenet. (That is not a reflection in my state of health.) Some of you
may know about electronic bulletin boards. It is sort of a computerized
free-for-all where discussions go on all across the country. Live TV

died in the late 1950s, electronic bulletin boards came along in the mid-1980s, meaning there was about a 25-year gap when it was difficult to put your foot in your mouth and have people all across the country know about it.

Most of my writing, however, is not for Usenet any more than it is for L_a_n'_s_L_a_n_t_e_r_n. The vast majority of my writing is for the M_T_V_o_i_d.

That is, as far as I know, the only weekly fanzine in America. However, the subscription rate will kill you: you have to come to work for AT&T. If any of you do come to AT&T just to get the M_T_V_o_i_d, I wish you would tell the employment people so. I am sure it would contribute greatly to their shock and amusement. And turnabout is fair play: several of the people they have sent to our department have contributed greatly to our shock and amusement.

Most of the writing I do for the M_T_V_o_i_d falls into two categories. I write film reviews for which I am widely reputed to have no taste, and I write little comments on life for which I am widely regarded as being an idiot. This last, I think, is the result of a lack of discernment on the part of my readers. The public seems incapable of distinguishing between your garden variety idiot and your genuine lunatic. It is the same confusion the public has had over the last five Presidents.

The sort of thing that will start me writing about life is like recently when I was watching TV. I was watching an old news show on A & E and the announcer came on and said, "The Twentieth Century will continue in a moment." Actually I had no doubt that it was true, but for a moment I considered bolting to my window to see if anything looked different. You also hear some strange things on PBS, what used to be called "educational television." "Civilisation is brought to you by Union Carbide." I think that statement underrates the culture of New Jersey--something, frankly, I hadn't thought was even possible. "Mystery is made possible by the Mobil Corporation." It certainly was true during the energy crisis. I had not realized it was still going on. "Nature is made possible by the Exxon Corporation." No, I thought Nature was made d_i_f_f_i_c_u_l_t by the Exxon Corporation.

Well, I wanted to give an example of my writing. And in deference

to Mr. Resnick, I looked for one with a mention of elephants.

I was awakened from my reverie by the scream of an enraged bull elephant. It sounded close, closer than I would have thought. How could I have let a big animal like that get so close without my knowing it? And how was it just yards away, maybe feet? And as yet I had not fathomed the true nature of the threat.

If there is one thing I have learned it's that nature is treacherous and unpredictable. Yeah, I had read in college about how wonderful nature was, how it was fragile, how to had to be protected. Maybe that's all true. But maybe also these people who told me that had never really pitted themselves against nature at full force. Maybe they'd had a little bit of nature and not seen it at its full power. Like someone standing in a shower can't really guess how powerful the ocean's riptides really are. A little bit of nature can be gentle; a lot can be deadly. Ask primitive man how fragile nature really is. Civilized man has isolated himself from nature and has forgotten so much.

Sure, I'd heard bad things about this territory. Little half-jokes. But who knew what was to come? I'd lived here for a decade, gone to work, heard the jokes about the mosquito being New Jersey's state bird, but it wasn't until that night, the night of the screaming elephant, that I had really pitted myself against nature. One thing for sure. When you hear the scream of a bull elephant that close in New Jersey, something is really wrong. I reached for my remote control unit, stopped the movie on my VCR, and listened to the sound. The backyard, for sure. I cautiously turned on the lights and looked through the glass doors--nothing. Nothing to be seen. Then a suspicion dawned on me. My air conditioner had been maintenance-free for nine years. Could that be an illusion? Maybe the big fan needs oil once in a while.

I yelled to Evelyn to turn off the air conditioner at the thermostat. At the sound of the click, the screaming in the backyard subsided. "Oil," I said. A little 10W40 in the right place was what was called for.

Ah, but it wouldn't be so easy. There were screws that had to be removed, screws that had corroded in place. Yet they would have to be loosened before I could get to the "oil here" hole--odd that I'd never noticed it before. Engrossed in my work with my back to the yard, I was completely surprised by the initial attack. I have new respect for the movie J a w s. Those unexpected attacks with their suddenness are just like the real world, but at least with a shark you know the instant of the attack. A far more subtle beast is the New Jersey mosquito. Out of the skies come eight or ten, driven mad by the smell of blood and sweat and eventually fear.

Out of the night they came at me, one after another. You see them there hanging over your legs, your arms. Sometimes you can scare them away before they attack....

Sometimes you can't.

For a half-hour I struggled. I knew I had a job that had to get done. Sometimes I worked. Sometimes I defended myself. Occasionally I killed one, but the only way to do that was to slap it against my own leg. I have mixed feelings about killing. My philosophy says kill no animal that does not threaten my life, but to see the dead carcass of a foe lying there, even on my own leg, is to taste a small victory.

The work was slow, but in the end victory was mine. I struggle back to the protection of the house. Yes, the final victory was mine, but at what a cost! Six bites on one leg (including the vulnerable ankle), two on the other. One on the back. And one renegade mosquito loose in the house. It had come in with me. I would have to hunt it down. Capture it. Perhaps kill it. No one would be safe in the house until that dirty job was done. But that was a job for another day. For now I rested.

I should give this speech a socko finish. I should say something silly, stupid, and absurd. But as I think this audience deserves more than one silly, stupid, absurd statement, I turn the floor over to Evelyn.

