Subject: SF-LOVERS Digest Volume 6, Issue 53
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SF-LOVERS Digest 11-Oct-82 Volume 6 : Issue 53

Today's Topics:
Destination Moon, violence, Castenada, Cordwainer Bird, Herbert's
THE WHITE PLAGUE, Brunner's STAND ON ZANZIBAR, shielding in PODKAYNE,
British education, Lem, COURTSHIP RITE, A PERFECT VACUUM

Date: 13 Sep 1982 20:30:53 EST (Monday)
From: Mike Meyer
Subject: Destination Moon
To: sf-lovers at sri-csl
Cc: mwm at OKC-UNIX

Destination Moon ran on the babble box here about a week ago, and (after the discussion on sfl) I made sure to catch it. The credits at the begining of the file listed Heinlein as the sciencetific advisor.

However, one of the key characters (The ex-military man who was the driving force behind the moon rocket) looked like some of the pictures of Heinlein from that period. The joes who ran the film didn't bother running the trailing credits, which carried the actors names. Does somebody know if that was him?

mike

Date: 13 Sep 1982 21:03:05 EST (Monday)
From: Mike Meyer
Subject: Violence In Our Time
To: sf-lovers at sri-csl
Cc: mwm at OKC-UNIX

On the subject of why movies/sf/video games/etc are so violent, there seem to me to be two (nearly mutually contradictory) explanations:

1: These things are all escapism/entertainment (ESCAPE to something by Ellison?) and as such feature things that people find exciting/entertaining. This implies action, and lots of it; most of this is translated to Violence.

2: People are basically violent.

The first of these is the one that most people would like to believe is true. I am fairly certain that this is what applies in my case: I tend to read sf that is either action/adventure (Hard sf, and most of the things run by Analog), or go looking for things that make me think (Ellison and some of the rest of the `new wave'). Anything that is neither of these two (We Who Are About To... & The Lathe of Heaven are good examples: both of them were slow and had obvious solutions) I tend to avoid.

So we have one example where the first case applies. As a good counterexample consider the success of Ordinary People. Very little action, and problems that you can run into in real life without suddenly qualifying as a @B(HERO). If everybody who went to movies were escaping, I don't think that movie would have done well at all.

This leaves us with people being basically violent. In support of this we have the rising crime rate. We can also note that the good old U. S. of A. has been engaged in armed conflict of some sort or another for something like 200 years during its 206 year history. As counterpoints we have vegetarianism. There also seems to be a growing number of people in my circle of friends who find the thought of consciously doing harm to another person/being sickening. These people are still in the minority, but the number is growing.

Conclusions? It seems that both reasons apply. There are people who are there to avoid something obnoxious in the real world (like the real world), and people who enjoy violence for the sake of violence. Hopefully, the second class is in the minority and shrinking, but the evidence doesn't point that way.

Video games are another matter entirely. I've never met anybody who played them (as opposed to dropping a quarter now and then for social reasons) who thought of them as anything but a GAME. By definition, a game involves competition. In this case, the competition is you vs. the computer, and these things come across better if there is some object/objects on the screen that you can be seen to competing against, or fighting.

There are non-violent video games. Check out Actavision's Barnstorming. In this you are trying to fly a biplane through some set number of barns in as little time as possible. The `violence' in this game happens when you hit something (a windmill, a barn or a goose), and the plane bounces a little

and slows down. These things are manifestly to be avoided, so Barnstorming actually encourages non-violence!

Sorry 'bout the long non-sf discussion.

`And if you hear me sobbing once in a while, it's only because
you've killed me, too...'

mike

Date: 13 Sep 82 16:11:45-EDT (Mon)
From: J C Patilla
To: sf-lovers at Sri-Csl
cc: jcp.jhu at UDel-Relay
Subject: Castenada, Cordwainer Bird
Via: jhu; 14 Sep 82 3:52-EDT

A couple of issues back there was a flame on Carlos Castenada (sp?), accusing him of being a fantastical fraud. Those interested should see two books edited by Richard deMille, "Castenada's Journey" and "The Don Juan Papers", in which the editor and company do their best to prove Castenada a fraud. I have only recently read some of the don Juan books myself, and having a degree in anthropology, I was amazed to discover that he was passing this stuff off as honest-to-God *ethnography* - he actually got his PhD for "Journey to Ixtlan", submitted under a different title.

Re Cordwainer Bird - Ellison goes into his use of this covername in some detail in the forward to a story in a recent paperback edition of "Strange Wine".

j c patilla
jcp.jhu@udel-relay

Date: 14 September 1982 1611-EDT
From: Don Provan at CMU-10A
Subject: Carlos Castenada
To: SF-LOVERS at SRI-CSL

i like the Castenada books and believe in a lot that they say. if i'm so greatly wrong, i'd be interested to hear why. i've never been into halucinogenic drugs, so blasting me for being manipulated by a conniving author is not sufficient. *if*

Castenada was manipulating his readers, and *if* he was doing
it just to make money and is a real phoney, that *still* isn't
an argument against the basic philosophy expressed in the books.
as it is, the note in V6 #45 doesn't give any real evidence for
any of these three points.

Date: 14 Sep 1982 0123-PDT
From: Dolata at SUMEX-AIM
Subject: Frank Heberts The White Plague
To: sf-lovers at SRI-CSL

Nano-review: so-so.

The White Plague has an interesting plot idea which is almost developed
well. Characters who are almost real. Biochemistry which is almost
correct. And an editor who did almost nothing! The book is almost
worth buying.

The book starts out with an interesting twisting and intertwining of
several peoples lives. The style is very involved, and it makes one
think and puzzle at bits of the first chapter. However, as the book goes
on the style gets simpler and simpler, the intertwining soon restricting
itslef to chapters, then pretty much abandoned altogether.

The book is flat. Considering that all life is facing possible extinction,
very little of that feeling of DESPERATION comes through. Instead, the
book has as much End Of The World feeling as 'Travels With Charley'.

This book suffers from a problem that seems to be plaguing many SF books
these days; either editors who don't edit, or writers who pad. This
book weighs in at 400 pages, of which 200 are story and 200 are baggage.
A good editor could have chopped the dead wood out and produced a much tighter
more 'desparate' story. It is hard to believe that the End Of The World is
near when the characters take a leasurely many week tramp through the woods.

Do other people think that modern SF&F books are tending to be overlong?
If people send to me (dolata@sumex-aim) I'll tally the results and send
it into sf-lovers in a week or so...

Dan

Date: 13 Sep 1982 2100-PDT
From: Mike Peeler

Subject: Re: John Brunner (SF-LOVERS Digest V6 #47)
To: Allen at YALE
cc: SF-LOVERS at SRI-CSL
In-Reply-To: Your message of 24-Aug-82 2101-PDT

Todd,

I am sure you will get a hundred replies to your remark, "Zanzibar is well known, but never won any awards or great acclaim," so I will be brief: since when have we started considering Hugo Award winners deprived of acclaim?

Cheers,
Mike

Date: 14 Sep 1982 11:03:45-EDT
From: csin!cjh at CCA-UNIX
To: sf-lovers at sri-csl
Subject: shielding in Podkayne

I seem to recall that the statement was that the ordinary structure of the ship provided the layers of shielding---there were four decks, representing increasingly lower-class accommodations as you went inward, and each deck flooring had to be sufficiently substantial (in order to support herds of people at up to one G) that it incidentally provided the necessary radiation shielding. So your description, while more economical than four layers on the outside, would still require more material than Heinlein describes--- and hence would probably be thoroughly uneconomical since the ship travels in continuous-acceleration "orbits" and changes spin to match the gravity of the next port of call (yes, I know the spin should be gyro-stored, but you're going to have significant inefficiencies in such a system). Speaking of ship spinning, did you notice that they stopped spinning the ship to dock? This strikes me as a bad idea, unless you really want to be able to bring in peers and peons by difference entrances. . . .

Date: 14 Sep 82 15:38:55-EDT (Tue)
From: David Axler
To: sf-lovers at Sri-Csl
Subject: Comments on Vol 6, #s 44-47
Via: UPenn; 14 Sep 82 19:44-EDT

1) British Education (per hjjh@utexas-11)

A co-worker of mine who was once an Oxford don pointed out several years back that one of the biggest distinctions between the US and UK educational systems is the expectation that, no matter what one's field might be, one's college education is almost totally focused on one's major -- all the liberal arts courses and the "broadening" that the average American college student is forced into via electives, sub-majors, and similar mechanisms don't exist. Instead, the British student has had his or her breadth supplied at the high school level, where it belongs.

2) "Destination Moon" (per Griffin @ sumex-aim)

At the L-5 meetings in April, where Heinlein was a Guest of Honor, the film "Destination Moon" was shown several times to commemorate Heinlein's part in its making, which was not as technical advisor, but rather as writer. One can see many points in the flick where RAH drew almost directly from his own stories, esp. "The Man Who Sold the Moon."

3) Stanislav Lem (re many assorted entries)

Overall, I think that Lem has been over-rated, primarily as a result of his critical reception. When was the last time you saw a "standard" sf or fantasy writer given front-page treatment in the NY Times? As several folks have noted, how good Lem seems is very dependent on his translator; however, since he is, I'm told, fairly fluent in English himself, I'm minded to wonder why he doesn't take the time to check out the translations himself.

The Continental writer who, to my mind, makes Lem pale in comparison is Italo Calvino. Often, their books deal with similar themes, but Calvino's work (or, at least, his translations) are far more readable. I especially recommend his latest piece of fiction, "If On a Winter's Night A Traveller...", in which the classic them of works within works within works within.... gets a superb treatment. In some ways, Calvino reminds me of Borges, in part because they both have an interest in the occult and/or mystic, but Calvino writes in a manner far less diffuse than Borges.

4) Casteneda & Fantasy (re decvax!utzoo!watmath!watarts!geo)

Ever since Casteneda's first book appeared, there has been a good bit of controversy within the anthropological realms as to what his truth level really might be. There have been a number of articles defending his work as good, honest field work, but there have also been many anthropologists who think that his books are pure fiction. They don't mind the fictionalization, but they do resent his claims of academic credentials as a mechanism for selling his books.

(By the way, the best spoof of Castenada is to be found on The Firesign Theatre's album "Everything You Know is Wrong," which also takes on UFO cults, the Air Force's plans for alien invasions, and Evel Knievel. It may be out of print, but it's worth finding at your local cutout store.)

5) Violence and the Roadrunner

The last three issues of "National Lampoon" have had an excellent series dealing with the notion that the Coyote finally gets sufficiently fed up with his failures that he sues the Acme Products Corp. (suppliers of all the items that never catch the bird) on assorted counts. The legal machinations on both sides ring all too true. Whether you're on the side of the Roadrunner, or that of Wile E., you should look this one up.

6) Courtship Rite (re Walker @CMU-10a)

I talked briefly w/Kingsbury at Chicon, and he commented that the serial version of the story was over 20K words shorter than the bookstore version, but that he got to do the trimming, so there was some control over what was lost. He agrees with me that the cover does not accurately depict the scene it was intended to represent, and that the tattooing has no relationship whatsoever to that described in the book. In fact, the artist originally didn't want to do tattoos on the bodies at all!

Unlike many authors (tho' this may change as time goes on), Kingsbury actively seeks contact w/fans at conventions. He even goes so far as to throw his own open parties! Certainly a far cry from those who hole up in the SFWA suite. . . but such is life.

7) John Brunner (re N.NELSON@SU-lots)

John Brunner wrote three novels in the same world-scenario. The third (your article mentions the first two -- Stand on Zanzibar and The Jagged Orbit) was The Sheep Look Up. It didn't get quite the acclaim of the other two, for a number of reasons (all wrong, I dare say).

The key factor was that Stand on Zanzibar was, to many sf readers, a bold and daring experiment in writing style. (That, of course, is because few of them recognized that Brunner was, quite intentionally, adapting the style of John dos Passos [q.v., U.S.A.] to science fiction.) I suspect that it was style, rather than quality, which won this book the Hugo. (Note: I'm NOT knocking the book; it's one of my favorites on both style and quality.) When Jagged Orbit appeared about eighteen months later, the newness of what he was doing had worn off, and the fans didn't respond as positively. When The Sheep Look Up (which deals extensively with the problems of pollution and industry in the future Brunner had posited) came out, the style was old hat and interest had waned. (It might even be the case that many fans resented books that demanded a bit of thought during the reading process, but perchance I'm too snide.)

One key feature in Stand on Zanzibar was the coming-to-awareness of the giant computer, Shalmanesar (sp?). Curiously, a fairly recent academic book from MIT Press (I don't recall the precise title, but it's something on the order of "The Cybernetic Intelligence in Science Fiction," by Patricia Warringer) which does note later works by Brunner on this theme fails to even consider this aspect of SoZ, focusing instead on Asimov's positronic brains and Three Laws. It's work like this that makes me suspect my fellow academics should be kept away from sf, for their own safety.

Well, enough for now . . .time to read the next few issues, which just arrived.
Dave

Date: 12 Sep 1982 8:19:25 EDT (Sunday)
From: Andrew Malis
Subject: A perfect Vacuum
To: sf-lovers@sri-csl
Cc: malis at BBN-UNIX, ucbvax!sdcsvax!sdchema!donn@Berkeley

I have also always wanted to get A Perfect Vacuum, especially after having read excerpts of it in The New Yorker. It is a collection of ridiculously pompous "scholarly" reviews of non-existent books, and the "reviews" that I read in New Yorker were absolutely wonderful. Well, I was on a trip to Europe this summer, and in an English bookstore in Vienna (Shakespeare and Co.), I found a British trade paperback that was a collection of Solaris, The Chain of Chance, and A Perfect Vacuum. Since I didn't previously own any of the three, this was absolutely perfect, and I snapped it right up. If you want to order the book from your local store, the book is a King Penguin, published in Britain by Penguin Books, 625 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10022, and was first printed in 1981. The ISBN number is 0 14 00.5539 8, and the suggested price is 3.95 pounds, or $9.95 Canadian.

The translations are by Joanna Kilmartin and Steve Cox for Solaris, Louis Iribarne for The Chain of Chance, and Michael Kandel for A Perfect Vacuum. I don't know if these are the same translators for the American editions or not.

If you like imaginary literary criticism, then you'll LOVE Vladimir Nobokov's Pale Fire, which contains the same sort of review of a non-existent epic poem, and is absolutely hilarious, especially if you suffered through the real thing in high school or college.

Andy Malis

Date: 12 September 1982 14:42-EDT
From: John G. Aspinall
Subject: Sequel to Brunner's Zanzibar
To: Allen at YALE
cc: SF-LOVERS at MIT-MC

According to the cover blurb, "The Sheep Look Up" is a sequel to

"Stand on Zanzibar". It is not an obvious sequel; it does not contain the same set of characters etc., but it certainly could take place in the same universe, a few years later.

Re your comments about "Jagged Orbit" - I have always regarded that as a good but imperfect stab at what he finally covered much better in "Shockwave Rider".

I've read most things by Brunner that I could get a hand on - I don't have my collection handy, but those that come to mind include :

Stand on Zanzibar - highly recommended
The Shockwave Rider - ditto

The Sheep Look Up - well worth the read, but not first rank
The Jagged Orbit - ditto

The Infinitive of Go - a novelty - Brunner discovers hackers' language

The Dreaming Earth - read 'em at the laundromat, but don't break a
Age of Miracles - date to do so.
several others

John Aspinall

End of SF-LOVERS Digest
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