Subject: SF-LOVERS Digest Volume 6, Issue 55
Posted by Anonymous on Tue, 31 Jul 2012 04:04:39 GMT
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Originally posted by: utzoo!decvax!ucbvax!ARPAVAX:UNKNOWN:sf-lovers

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Posted: Tue Oct 12 02:50:27 1982
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>From SFL@SRI-CSL Tue Oct 12 00:01:07 1982

SF-LOVERS Digest 11-Oct-82 Volume 6 : Issue 55

Today's Topics:
Violence, Lem, Invaders in Bay Area, Jedi, E.E. Smith,
Le Guin's THE COMPASS ROSE

From: duntemann.wbst @ PARC-MAXC
Date: 12-Sep-82 21:30:49 EDT
Subject: Peace Makes Dull Reading
To: SFL@SRI-CSL

I sympathize with the chap who bemoans the preponderance of violence in SF. I refuse, in fact, to see Bladerunner because of the nauseating descriptions garnered from friends.

But consider what SF is: NOT prediction, but entertainment. Every creative writing course I ever took stressed that without conflict, you don't have a story. There are many different kinds of conflict, but the easiest to concoct (and apparently the most attractive, judging from the box office take of such pasture puddings as "Halloween" and "Friday 13") is stick-em-in-the-guts violence.

Remove conflict from SF and what you have are travelogs. Clarke has done whole books of such travelogs, written as speculation but wailing for incorporation into works of fiction. In fact, his novel "Imperial Earth" was almost utterly without conflict, and came across pretty much as a travelog of Earth in the year 2350, when all our problems have been oh-so-neatly (and I damned well didn't believe any of it) put to bed.

I write regularly, and I publish a few stories a year. I have tried writing "idea stories" which underplay conflict, and I get them bounced an awful lot. Gotta have conflict, sayeth the rejection slips.

Sadly, only a few stories come to mind as lacking heavy violent conflict.

One obscure one is "world in a Bottle" by Kim Lang, and no, I don't even remember where I read it. Also, "Shortstack" by (I think) Henry Kuttner. It's rough to do a whole novel without violence. Maybe "The Gods Themselves" by Asimov. I may think of others and put them forth.

But honestly, peace makes for dull reading. If handled well, violence in fiction can be a warning. If handled badly (as in Bladerunner) it's nothing more than playing to our adrenals for bux.

Nytall,

Jeff Duntemann

Date: 13 Sep 1982 11:36:19-EDT
From: csin!cjh at CCA-UNIX
To: spac.gatech at udel-relay
Subject: violence in SF
Cc: sf-lovers at sri-csl

Let's leave aside for the moment the obvious answer that \some/ sort of conflict is necessary to motivate the tale---otherwise you end up with what Harlan Ellison sneeringly calls "pink-and-white bunny rabbit stories".

First, note that you have grouped together a number of people with very different slants; Haldeman concludes that war in space is likely because we won't have adequately put down the flippos who love to make war here on Earth (consider the first officer and non-com in THE FOREVER WAR, both of whom took cuts in rank to get into action).

Second, SF comes out of a violent tradition that is only gradually being shaken; just as horse opera needs gunfights, space opera needs space battles (Consider Doc Smith, "worldwrecker" Hamilton, and others of their period). Note that various authors have worked against this; half or more of the heroes of the Foundation trilogy are those who use trickery of one sort or another to \\prevent// a conflict (the downfall of Bel Riose, the final defeat of the Mule).

In post-World War II SF I'd say the majority of stories don't deal directly with armed conflict. You mention Retief, who is certainly violent on a small scale and who in at least one story brings in plans that tip the balance in an invasion of a planet; I would counter with Flandry, who has promoted some wars but has generally worked to delay the final battle by using whatever underhanded means he has available (and Flandry is hardly an unmitigated hero; Anderson is not being coy when F's archenemy tells him they two are much alike).

Considering more recent times, I don't think any of Le Guin's heroes are military people; some of them muddle because they are thrust into political conflicts but they are always working for a peaceful solution. And for a capper look at this year's Hugo winner, DOWNBELOW STATION: the people who come

out looking best are those who break out of the imperium vs. colonies struggle and make themselves an independent entity.

Date: 11 Sep 1982 22:00:45 EDT (Saturday)
From: Winston Edmond
Subject: Re: SF-LOVERS Digest V6 #45
In-Reply-to: Your message of Sunday, August 22, 1982 8:02AM
To: SF-LOVERS at SRI-CSL

(In the air is the smell of gasoline; you hear a match striking...)

Why violence? Because violence isn't the point, it's simply the easiest way to evoke certain emotions.

Two things: First, change is often viewed as disruptive, as upsetting the existing order of things. Significant changes often cause major disruptions. Examples are changes in philosophy of government by those operating the government; changes in manufacturing technology that may leave many jobless while creating new kinds of jobs for others; a sudden, successful military invasion of a neighboring country. Presenting the disruption as visible violence makes the abstract feeling of change immediate and discernible to all. The magnitude of the violence is an indication of the magnitude of change being wrought.

Second, people are often confused by what appears to them to be a bewildering array of options, choices, and consequences. Yet most people have experienced times when their objective was sufficiently clear and their means of achieving it sufficiently within their reach that all the confusion could be swept aside and consumed in positive, directed action. The central figures are often portrayed as people who have arrived at such a moment in their lives. The violence is their sweeping aside all obstacles, no matter how fearsome, no matter how formidable to achieve their objectives. In many cases, the objectives are presented as the "right" choices, perhaps even the "moral" choice.

In short, violence is an oversimplification of the world which helps to establish right and wrong (or "us" and "them") and which tries to say that problems can be solved. Negotiators remind an audience that life is complicated and that problems usually have many sides, conflicting goals, and that solution is difficult at best if you fundamentally grant the "other side" an equal standing. What's the most effective way to "solve" the "Palestinian problem"? Wipe out the people who are causing the problem and then there will be no more problem. Easy, huh? Negotiations could go on forever. If a book or a movie is to keep the reader's interest, it can't drag on forever. The successful books about negotiators are those about ones who, through insight or trickery, cut through all obstacles to peace in a rapid, decisive

manner.

Violence works because there are a lot of people who don't want to have to deal with the world in all its complication. The problem is that when books or movies resort to violence, they can evade teaching us how to deal more effectively with the world around us. And, in the end, if you haven't learned how to handle complexity, it won't surprise anyone that you resort to violence.

(The fire dies down...
End flame.)

Date: 12 Sep 1982 0030-EDT
From: Joseph A. Frisbie
Subject: Re: SF-LOVERS Digest V6 #46
To: SF-LOVERS at SRI-CSL

In-Reply-To: Your message of 11-Sep-82 2251-EDT

Lem's A Perfect Vacuum, has been in print for at least 5 years (hardcover at least). I took it out of the library then, and haven't see it around since. I found it to be a bit random, but I guess if you're a great fan you'd like it.

Joe

Date: 11 Sep 1982 1801-PDT
From: Jim McGrath (SF-LOVERS Moderator)
Subject: Invaders
To: sfl at SRI-CSL
Reply-to: SF-LOVERS-REQUEST at MIT-AI

Are showing on channel 36 at 5:00pm on Saturdays in the Bay area.

Jim

Date: 29 Aug 1982 1601-CDT
From: Greg Elder
Subject: Revenge of the Jedi
To: sf-lovers at MIT-AI

The October issue of Epic Illustrated shows a couple of production paintings from RotJ. The magazine also states that the movie is scheduled to be released on Friday, 27 May 83.

Date: 26 Aug 1982 1725-EDT
From: YOUNG at DEC-MARLBORO
To: SF-LOVERS at MIT-AI
Subject: [David Dyer-Bennet : SF Lovers submission]

- - - - - - - Begin message from: David Dyer-Bennet
Date: 24 August 1982 21:48-EDT (Tuesday)
From: David Dyer-Bennet
Subject: SF Lovers submission
To: young at market

(Subject: SF-LOVERS Digest V6 #40)

(Tim Shimeall) Spacehounds of IPC has no apparent connection to other works. The tone is closer to Skylark than to the Lensman universe, but there is no evidence of any connection.

The Family D'Alembert series is published by Pyramid as by E.E. "Doc" Smith with Stephen Goldin. I have only 4 volumes of it; my last, Getaway World, carries a 1977 copyright date. I have seen them in stores much more recently than that, in fact within the last year.

*** SPOILER, the following message reveals information about Le Guin's ***
*** THE COMPASS ROSE.

Date: 12 Sep 82 2:52-PDT
From: mclure at SRI-UNIX
To: sf-lovers at Sri-Csl
Subject: Le Guin book review

n559 0219 12 Sep 82
BC-ROSE-09-12
A BOOK REVIEW
By Scott Sanders
(c) 1982 Chicago Sun-Times (Field News Service)

THE COMPASS ROSE: Short Stories. By Ursula K. Le Guin. Harper & Row. $14.95.

(Scott Sanders, an essayist and novelist, teaches at Indiana University.)

Just as we read the news, so we should read the olds - we should study accounts of what is perennial in human experience. The richest accounts I know are kept in books, especially books of fiction. Although novelists are sometimes confused on this point (taking the word "novel" too literally and regarding themselves as journalists), the greatest works of fiction have rarely chronicled the day-to-day, but have reported instead on those matters of nature and character and thought that change slowly, if at all, beneath the shimmer of current events. To paraphrase poet William Carlos Williams, "It is difficult to get the news from stories, yet men and women die miserably avery day for lack of what is found there."

For 20 years now, in more than a dozen novels and several books of tales, Ursula K. Le Guin has been luring us down through the changing surface of the everyday, into the durable landscapes of dream and fairy tale and myth. Because those landscapes are often projected onto alien planets, which her characters sometimes reach by means of spaceships, publishers have seen fit to call much of her work science fiction. But her work has more in common with the metaphysical fables of Kafka and Borges than with the technological projections of Asimov and Heinlein.

Le Guin draws many of her dominant images, as well as her habit of vigorous speculation, from science. But her concerns and her narrative patterns are much older than science, as old as the Bible and the "Odyssey." The 20 recent stories gathered in "The Compass Rose" display in brilliant variety her unsettling fusion of science and myth, modern surfaces and ancient depths.

In "The Water Is Wide," for example, a physicist is driven to suicide by his knowledge concerning the world's nuclear arsenals. The technology that triggers his anguish is a recent one, but the anguish itself is as old as conscience. In a dialogue called "Intracom," a spaceship becomes the metaphor for that earliest of traveling vessels, the human body, in this case a female one, which gestates that primordial alien, a fetus.

Another story unfolds on a distant planet, where a second-generation painter learns to see his alien environment with a new eye for its unearthly beauties. Beneath the contemporary garb of space-travel, his story is that of all immigrants, who must slowly learn to grasp with their minds the new land which they so quickly occupy with their bodies.

"The Pathways of Desire" is also set on another planet, this one a garden paradise. The anthropologists who study the place conclude that it is an adolescent boy's dreamscape, and they in turn, re-enacting a Hindu myth, become the dreamers of their own story. Le Guin strips away layer after layer, until the scientists are revealed to be the avatars of gods.

This interplay between ancient and modern is nowhere more chillingly displayed than in "The New Atlantis." As a more corrupt and oppressive version of our own world sinks into the ocean, a fresh world arises from the depths. The two are bound together like the rising and falling ends of a teeter-totter, and the prose styles that Le Guin uses to describe the dying and the nascent world answer one another like antiphonal voices in music. There is talk in the story of continental drift and plate tectonics; but the deeper theme is the power of human yearning to conjure up a better, nobler dwelling-place in the midst of suffering.

Occasionally her characters even seek out bleak landscapes and undergo suffering, as if the outward emptiness called forth an inward plenitude. The women in "Sur" who journey to the South Pole are drawn by the "white place on the map, that void." They conduct their expedition in the most scientific manner; but the compulsion that drives them and the discoveries they make have nothing to do with reason, and very little to do with the 20th century.

Not all the stories in "The Compass Rose" are thus alloyed of science and myth. Several of them record the derailments of the heart brought on by the death of a parent or spouse. In the second half of "Two Delays on the Northern Line," for instance, a man whose life has been shattered by the death of his wife inherits a house in another city, and that new home restores to him a sense of purpose. Several of them show us the world as it might be observed through the eyes of beasts. Thus we see a maze and a psychologist from the rat's point of view. We watch from inside a she-wolf as her mate, in the dark of the moon, changes from wolf into that most hated of all brutes, a man.

But above all, these stories suggest that the human capacity for imagining contrary realities - and especially that capacity for public dreaming we call art - endures, whatever else may shift about in the winds of technology. In one of the most powerful stories, a man who has been sent to the madhouse because of his unorthodox political beliefs proves his sanity by imagining a perfect rose. The imagined flower is his song, his poem, his painting, his gesture of opposition and affirmation. Electrical treatments will eventually destroy him. But in the meantime the psychiatrist who is monitoring his thoughts is so enlightened by the rose that she takes up the condemned man's politics. And so imagination cuts through even the latest model traps.

All of these tales move - as Le Guin has written elsewhere that good fiction should move - in "the direction of the great myths and legends, which is always toward an intensification of the mystery of the real." Her deepest subject is that of a quest, the tale of a man or woman who has been cast into a baffling world among strangers and must find there a true identity, a correct path, a mate or comrade, a way home.

END

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