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To: SF-LOVERS@SRI-CSL

SF-LOVERS Digest      Saturday, 11 Dec 1982      Volume 6 : Issue 103

Today's Topics:

Books/Stories - Vinge True Names and Anderson's The Saturn Game,  
Wolfe's The Book of the New Sun, Varley's work  
and why are Titan/Wizard tiresome?  
Themes - Shrinking, reality alternation  
Misc - SF media, decompression, Hitch-Hiker's Guide  
to the Net (part 1)  
T.V. - Star Trek

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Date: 10-Dec-82 15:24:21 PST (Friday)  
From: Pettit at PARC-MAXC  
Subject: True Names and The Saturn Game

In regard to csin!cjh at CCA-UNIX's statement in V6#99, "I happen to think that 'True Names' was better than the winner, Anderson's 'The Saturn Game'; that may reflect my dislike of tSG's subject":

What does csin!cjh see as "tSG's subject"? It seems to me that "True Names" and "The Saturn Game" had very nearly the SAME subject, to wit, an extension of the Fantasy Role Playing idea to where the fantasy world actually feels real to the player (or at least as real as a dream does to the dreamer). In True Names, the fantasy world was the way a human experienced direct neural IO linkage with a computer; in "The Saturn Game" it was the result of genetic and other enhancements to the imaginative capabilities of people sent on long space missions. Both stories played off the advantages of this enhanced experience against the dangers of being unable to respond properly to the real world while living in the fantasy one. This conflict was the major theme of "The Saturn Game"; it was a minor one in "True Names", whose main theme was the implications of machine/human symbiosis.

I too preferred "True Names" to "The Saturn Game", though I liked them both a lot. My preference is partly because I'm a programmer (not an astronaut or geologist), and Vinge did a very good job of capturing/extrapolating the culture of the programmer. I think Vinge also did a better job than Anderson at capturing the flavor of the FRP culture, and he was even quite good at representing the police-officer mentality. The characterization in "The Saturn Game" was weaker. But my main objection to "The Saturn Game" was that I could never really suspend my disbelief in the notion that a fantasized ice castle setting would have more emotional pull than the actual experience of walking about on Saturn's moon, no matter how altered the imaginations of the explorers were. In "True Names", the programmers were seated in consoles, with almost all their sensory input coming from the computer (near the end, it becomes a sensory overload, in fact), so it is much easier to believe that the fantasy world could become real than when it is an entirely internal construct competing with the astounding and demanding real experience of exploring a beautiful and dangerous new world.

Anderson probably won the Hugo not for the main theme of his work, but for the subplot of clever people in dire straits figuring out an ingenious way to rescue themselves. This plot has been a sure winner for SF short stories and novelettes ever since Asimov's first published story, "Marooned Off Vesta". In the same vein, I can recall a story about a couple "walking" a bubble-tent back to a moon base after a picnic in the nude, and getting a bad sunburn in the process. I don't remember the name or author. And one of Varley's stories with the clinging-mirror-spacesuits had a similar subplot ("Retrograde Summer", I think it was). How many others can you think of?

-- Teri Pettit at Xerox OSD

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Date: 9 Dec 82 22:11-PST  
From: mclure at SRI-UNIX  
Subject: Wolfe's The Book of the New Sun

I have now twice read the first volume (THE SHADOW OF THE TORTURER) in a vain attempt to convince myself that it is the beginning of an earth-shaking effort or "the best SF I've read all year (Le Guin)". It would appear to be the beginning of just another quest story and having just finished LORD OF THE RINGS for the first time, I don't think I can handle yet another of these. Could someone out there who has read the entire tetralogy and admires it please explain what he/she thinks is so marvelous about it? Mike "the Monk" Urban, are you listening? I'll admit that Wolfe handles his language better than

most SF authors I've read but the story itself seems extremely drawn out and the characters don't catch my fancy. Maybe it's just that I don't much care for sword and sorcery and quests.

Stuart

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Date: 10 Dec 1982 13:34-PST  
From: dietz%usc-cse@USC-ECL  
Subject: Shrinking

Fritz Leiber's "The Swords of Lankhmar" has Fahfrd (or the Grey Mouser?) shrink down to rat size. The extra mass was shed at the time of shrinking, leaving a pool of pinkish tissue. When the effect wore off the hero absorbed mass from surrounding objects, with amusing consequences.

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Date: 10 Dec 1982 1:52:07 CST (Friday)  
From: Mike Meyer  
Subject: short dump

~= FtG claimed that "SF is the last refuge of the MCP" or some such (oh, for a real mailer...). I remember seeing somewhere tht SF had the HIGHEST imply that you would have trouble as a writer. Just look at Alice Sheldon in all her avatars.

Finally, the Grand Master himself tends to make his female characters much more intelligent/competent/etc. than his male characters I have lots to say about the womens movement & ERA, but this isn't the place. FtG (whoever s/he is) can contact me personally if she wants to hear it. =~

Paul Fuqua mentioned changing reality via massed believe. He failed to mention a GOOD story that uses this idea, and a mediocre novel/movie.

The story is the Amber series by Zelazny, wherein the inhabits of the `base reality,' Amber, can move at will from one `reality,' or shadow, by moving, and thinking about what the want the universe to be like. Good stuff - when Good stuff - but I like reality-warping stories (probably has something to do with having a warped view or reality...)

The mediocre novel is `The Lathe of Heaven,' by LeGuin. The writing is up to LeGuin's usuall standard, but the solution is obvious from very early in the thing.

Almost forgot - Laumer has something using a concept similar to the Amber trick in 'The World Shuffler,' and it's sequel, 'The Time Bender.' This is Laumer with his tongue in his cheek, and I enjoyed it as much as I do the Retief stories.

Since short stories have been introduced in the time travel topic, I have to mention the classics:

'All You Zombies' has the most convoluted plot knot of anything I have ever read. For example, our hero is her own mother and father, and he introduced himself to herself.

'By His Bootstraps' is another tale wherein the protagonist meets himself coming, going, and trying to stop himself from going. This is also mind-warping stuff.

Both by Heinlein (The Grand Master).