

Special Group of the London Police, and the Rumbles (humanoid rodents of nasty temperament). They are Michael deLarrabeiti's Borribles.

THE MT VOID

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Borribles were once children who were outcast or runaways, but whom quickly develop pointed ears as a sign of "independence and intelligence." The Special Borrible Group of the London Police seek them out, for Borribles who are caught get their ears clipped, and henceforth are doomed to grow up into adventureless adults. Borribles never age, but death is quite familiar to them...

THE BORRIBLES is the first book in a trilogy (although the latter two were clearly afterthoughts once the first was written). Followed by THE BORRIBLES GO FOR BROKE and ACROSS THE DARK METROPOLIS, the series follows a "family" of Borribles as they deal with the grim-and-gritty underbelly of London. Their culture is sophisticated and consistent, centering on protecting each other, maintaining oral traditions, earning an Honorable Name, and following the guiding principle of Borrible life: "Don't get caught."

deLarrabeiti does an excellent job of painting the scenes of the shadowy parts of the city. He is equally good at portraying credible and distinguishable Borribles, although the villains are somewhat two-dimensionally evil. Although the topic being discussed is Urban Fantasy, the Borrible books are only tenuously fantastic -- with the exception of the Rumbles in the first book, and the ears throughout, the series has a real-world feel to it reminiscent of the Conan Doyle's Holmes stories. I recommend the first book for its imagination and clarity of vision; the latter two books are more of the same and hence come across almost as formula. [-jrrt]

2. One should be comfortable with technology without becoming too comfortable with a level of technology. Consider the Japanese. They were the best swordmakers in the world. They built a whole culture around the sword. When the gun came along they considered it, but when they saw what it would do to their established order,

they decided it would shake up too much. Power was having skilled swordsmen and to be a swordsman did take great skill. It did not take such skill and certainly not the same skill to shoot a gun. A very unskilled man could kill a highly skilled swordsman by keeping his distance and shooting a gun. So using a gun became very dishonorable. This is well illustrated in Musaki Kobayashi's film S_e_p_p_u_k_u (a.k.a., H_a_r_i_K_i_r_i) in which a very good swordsman is attacking a castle and has killed single-handedly perhaps twenty or more defending swordsmen. Finally the lord of the castle decides he cannot afford to lose more men so he does the dishonorable thing. He must, he reluctantly decides, bring out the gun. The lord kills his foe, but he had to give up his honor. Now this was always a puzzle to me. Why resist the best tools for the job, particularly when it could mean death? How do you stop your second-rate fighters from using the best weapons they can get?

Eventually the gun did get accepted in Japan when everyone else had them and Japan could resist no longer. And they paid a price for resisting as long as they did. And a lot of other technology was accepted as well. If the Japanese had any lingering doubts about the importance of being at the forefront of technology, those doubts died in August of 1945. Today the Japanese are vitally fascinated with the latest developments in electronics, in superconductivity, in cold fusion, and in just about anything else they think they can apply. Their world and their plans for the future adapt to each new development in technology.

And what of the country who taught Japan the importance of forefront technology in 1945? These days we seem to want to shy away from competing technologically with the Japanese. Detroit resisted building cars to compete with the economical and feature-laden cars of the Japanese. Japanese cars adapted to people's needs year by year--I could see it in my Toyota--while American cars stayed much the same. Innovation was adding fins or taking them off. Detroit fought for import restrictions and admonished the public to "Buy American." My understanding is that the Japanese were ready to ship us digital tape recorders and our government requested that they do not consider us a market. I keep

hearing stories about how the United States will compete with the Japanese in high-definition television. We do not want to have another embarrassing technological gap such as we had with VCRs. But everyone admits the Japanese have a big headstart on us. And the headstart is not because they had access to any technology that we did not. We were just comfortable with our level of technology in that area while the Japanese were getting their foothold. Now we are running a losing race with them.

Now granted there is a big difference between a digital tape recorder and a gun. But I wonder if it is not the same attitude behind giving both up.

3. Correction to last week's issue: The book by Poul Anderson was

T_h_e_B_o_a_t_o_f_a_M_i_l_l_i_o_n_Y_e_a_r_s, not T_h_e_B_o_o_k_o_f_a_M_i_l_l_i_o_n_Y_e_a_r_s. My typo, not Dale's. [-ecl]

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A belief is not true because it is useful.
-- Henri Frederic Amiel

FOUCAULT'S PENDULUM by Umberto Eco
(translated by William Weaver)
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990, ISBN 0-15-132765-3, \$22.95.
Short comments by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Umberto Eco, author of the very popular and very successful

medieval mystery T_h_e_N_a_m_e_o_f_t_h_e_R_o_s_e, has returned with another novel, this time only semi-medieval. F_o_u_c_a_u_l_t's_P_e_n_d_u_l_u_m is about ... well, it's hard to say what it's about. A vanity press publisher decides to produce a book detailing a secret plot by the Knights Templar, the Rosicrucians, and several dozen other groups to control the world. Along the way, Eco mixes in Brazilian religion, occultism, politics, and just about everything else. (There's probably even a kitchen sink in there somewhere.)

This book is so chock-a-block full of ideas, references to other works, and in-jokes that it is really impossible to describe it or do it justice. Rather than try, I will just say that if you enjoyed T_h_e_N_a_m_e_o_f_t_h_e_R_o_s_e for its complex plotting, you will probably enjoy this. If you enjoyed it for its medieval setting, you may still enjoy this, because although the setting is modern, there is much discussion of medieval events. But F_o_u_c_a_u_l_t's_P_e_n_d_u_l_u_m is a much more heavily layered book than T_h_e_N_a_m_e_o_f_t_h_e_R_o_s_e, and requires much more concentration. Several people have asked for my opinion on this book, and I wish I could be more coherent, but at least this may give you some idea of whether you might enjoy it.

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN, VOLUME 2: ALTERNATE HEROES

edited by Gregory Benford & Martin H. Greenberg
Bantam Spectra, 1990, ISBN 0-553-28279-4, \$4.50.

A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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This is the second (last?) of a series of alternate history short fiction. As with the other, W_h_a_t_M_i_g_h_t_H_a_v_e_B_e_e_n,_V_o_l_u_m_e_2:_A_l_t_e_r_n_a_t_e_E_m_p_i_r_e_s, the pieces here were commissioned for this volume but have appeared elsewhere between the time of their writing and their publication here. At least this volume indicates where they have been published previously, but in both cases one is left with the feeling that the publisher was trying to convince the buyer the stories were all new, when in fact the buyer may very well have most of them already.

Be that as it may, this book examines the "great man" theory of history--the idea that history is made by "great men" rather than by the "tide of events." The "great man" theory says that if Hitler weren't around, the Nazi Party would not have developed as it did; the "tide of events" theory says that if Hitler weren't there, someone else would have taken his place. Michael Moorcock's B_e_h_o_l_d_t_h_e_M_a_n is perhaps an extreme example of the latter. (Strangely enough, the first volume was not "tide of events" stories, but "failed events" stories--what if X hadn't happened?)

Unfortunately, many of the authors in this volume make their stories fit the "great man" theory by picking a great man, having something different happen to him, or having him do something different, though the "great man" usually seems to be more acted upon than acting in this anthology, and then stopping. There i_s no alternate history, just a suggestion of how one could write one. (Note: in discussing the stories, I will be often be telling what the change was. For some of the stories this might be considered a spoiler, so reader, beware!)

For example, Harry Turtledove's "The Last Article" postulates that Hitler's armies made it to India and were controlling it when Gandhi tried to use his policy of non-violence against them. This sounds more like an alternate event ("Hitler conquers India") than a "great man" story, and is fairly predictable. But it ends at this point. What happens next?

In "Lenin in Odessa" George Zebrowski postulates an early confrontation between Lenin and Stalin. But just when history changes, the story ends. What happens next? No answer. Harry Harrison and Tom Shippey's "A Letter from the Pope" has the same problem: just when Alfred changes his plans because he receives the chastising letter the Pope sent him (instead of not receiving it), the story ends. (This "great man" is so obscure to most readers that an introduction was included explaining what the story was about.) What happens next? We

aren't told. (The back blurb promises "a Europe converted to Viking paganism"--it isn't delivered.) "Loose Cannon" by Susan Shwartz has T. E. Lawrence surviving his motorcycle accident to take a role in the African campaigns of World War II. But just after he talks to Rommel, the story ends. What happens next? Who knows? In Judith Tarr's "Roncesvalles," when Charlemagne discovers Ganelon's treachery was bought by Christians, he decides to convert to Islam and side with the Moors. What happens next? We never find out. These all read like introductory chapters to alternate history novels that the authors might be planning, rather than full-fledged alternate history stories. The characters are well drawn in all the stories here--they just don't go anywhere.

Two stories deal with Abraham Lincoln. Michael Cassutt's "Mules in Horses' Harness" assumes Lincoln's death in 1863; James Morrow's "Abe Lincoln in McDonald's" includes time travel (Lincoln somehow travels forward in time to see the results of making a particular decision). I feel the use of time travel a n d alternate history lessens the latter, but perhaps I'm just a bit of a purist. I also find the alternate history set forth a bit unbelievable, but I would be willing to suspend disbelief for one change--but not for two. Cassutt's story has a couple of variations on the usual "what if the Civil War turned out differently?" theme, but nothing startling, not even his "surprise" revelation at the end. Neither one, by the way, is a present of "a Confederacy that won the Civil War," which the back cover touts. In this, at least, they show originality. "No Piece of Ground" by Walter Jon Williams is another Civil War variation, with Edgar Allan Poe a general in the Confederate Army. Marc Laidlaw's "His Powder'd Wig, His Crown of Thorns" deals with George Washington as the Savior of the Indians, though with a twist. We don't see enough of the alternate world to judge the reality of its texture, though the main character is well-drawn and draws the reader into what we do see of his world.

Barry Malzberg's picture of Hemingway as a hack science fiction writer in "Another Goddamned Showboat" is at least a change of pace. It was not quite as gimmicky as the similar story "Ike at the Mike" (by Howard Waldrop, not included in this volume). In common with the earlier discussed stories, was more a character study than a story, Malzberg picked a "great man" whose displacement would not leave one

asking, "Okay, but what happened next?" Hemingway's shift to science fiction would not be expected to produce the same sort of drastically alternate history that Charlemagne's conversion to Islam would, so Malzberg leaves his readers satisfied with the picture he draws.

Sheila Finch's musical Albert Einstein in "The Old Man and C" had nothing to hold my interest--even Einstein's musings on light seemed forced in the context of the story. "A Sleep and a Forgetting" by Robert Silverberg had an interesting premise (communications through the center of a star may get warped in such a way as to allow communication with the past/alternate worlds). But after hooking up with a world in which Genghis Khan did not become ruler of the Mongols, Silverberg's

Alternate Heroes

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characters don't seem to know what to do with it, and the ending makes no sense at all.

Harry Turtledove's second story in this collection, "Departures," is the base story of his "Byzantium" alternate history series in which Muhammed becomes a Christian monk rather than founding Islam. Again, it shows the split point and then drops it, but at least here there is already a milieu drawn with which readers of this collection are probably familiar.

I found Rudy Rucker's story about William Burroughs, Von Neumann, and the atomic bomb unreadable, except for the last couple of paragraphs, which deliver their message with all the subtlety of a sledge hammer. (In fairness I must say that I generally find Rucker unreadable, and this may be just one of my quirks--certainly other people whose opinions I respect like his writing.)

Of the fourteen stories in this volume, six are based on Twentieth Century men. Four more are based on men from American history. None are based on women. None have the richness of detail I found in several stories in the first volume (even though many of the authors are the same). Only the Harrison-Shippey, the Malzberg, and Turtledove's "Departures" seemed more than merely adequate, and several were below average. It may be that "great men" are less interesting than "failed events." But it is more likely that the apparent constraint of having the "great man" on stage throughout the story made it impossible to show the effects of the change in detail. Much as I liked the first

W_h_a_t
M_i_g_h_t_H_a_v_e_B_e_e_n, I can't really recommend this one.

[Note: After writing the above, I ran across the following quote from a letter from Olaf Stapledon to Naomi Mitchison written on 10 July 1940: "My (qualified) pacifism has been put in cold storage. But how loathsome it all is! An of course I remain fundamentally just as much pacifist as before. But at present pacifism simply won't work. I note in Gandhi's autobiography that his non-violence movement's success depended on the fact that some officials were decent folk. It would not have worked against a Nazi regime." I doubt Turtledove knew of this letter, since the observation is obvious, but who knows?]

GLORY

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: Excellent Civil War film of the first black regiment and the prejudice they faced. At times it seems a little over-idealized, but no more so than most films about World War II. Realistically photographed by Freddie Francis and well acted, particularly by Morgan Freeman. Rating: +2.

At a time when Hollywood is simply not making many films set in previous centuries, perhaps even the novelty of Edward Zwick's Civil War film G _ l _ o _ r _ y might carry it. However, Zwick's film goes beyond that to

being one of the best Civil War films ever made. G l o r y tells the story of the U. S. Army's 54th Massachusetts Regiment, the first black regiment in the Army's history. The 54th had two enemies it had to fight. The Confederate Army was second. First they had to fight the Union Army for the privilege of being treated as soldiers. From the start, the all-black regiment--with two white officers--was an experiment programmed for failure. Command was given to Robert Gould Shaw, a 23-year-old inexperienced at command. Further, they were criminally under-provisioned, having to battle the army for such basics as uniforms, shoes, socks, and guns; one scene shows a black soldier standing guard duty with a spear. They have to fight for provisions, they have to fight to be sent to the front, and finally they have to fight to fight. Their training was by--among others--an Irish racist who apparently thought that blacks were Hindus. In spite of this, and in spite of the army cheating them out of their fair salary, they distinguished themselves sufficiently to become cannon fodder. G l o r y is their story.

Or more accurately, it is the story of the white officers who led them and the story of five soldiers who shared the same tent upon enlisting. All the other blacks in the film are effectively spear-carriers (in some cases literally). Even given that Colonel Shaw was supposed to be young, Matthew Broderick seems a little too boyish for the role. He carries too much baggage from previous roles in which he always played the role of the "wise-guy kid." He is a little hard to take seriously as the committed idealist, though he does much better in Shaw's moments of self-doubt. Much better is Morgan Freeman as Rawlins. Freeman could easily have carried the film as the main character and as it is he is likely to get an Oscar nomination as Best Supporting Actor (as well as a nomination for Best Actor for D r i v i n g M i s s D a i s y).

One of the unsung stars of the film is Freddie Francis, director of photography. Francis was director of photography on such films as T h e I n n o c e n t s , T h e F r e n c h L i e u t e n a n t 's W o m a n , T h e E l e p h a n t M a n , and D u n e. Francis is superb at creating a period feel. From his visualization of the battle of Antietam, the viewer realizes that he is going for authentic feel rather than dramatic effect. His view of a Civil War surgery is somewhat harrowing, to say the least. His photography rounds out the film and makes for a very satisfying view of history. My rating is a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

Vintage, 1989, ISBN 0-679-72422-2, \$8.95.

A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper

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If your idea of a fun vacation is Beirut, you could be another P. J. O'Rourke. On the other hand, if you wouldn't be caught dead there (you'll pardon the expression), you should probably just stick to reading H_o_l_i_d_a_y_s_i_n_H_e_l_l.

P. J. O'Rourke managed to convince R_o_l_l_i_n_g_S_t_o_n_e magazine to bankroll his travel to such vacation spots as Beirut, Seoul, Manila (post-Marcos), Warsaw (pre-Walesa), Johannesburg, Heritage U.S.A., and the Epcot Center. If the last two don't sound so bad, wait until you read O'Rourke's descriptions. For example, of the Epcot Center, he says:

Today the future is a quagmire of micro-chips. They'll connect your television to somebody's typewriter, and if you can't score a million at Donkey Kong, you'll be out of work. Meanwhile, the rest of the world has become a jumble of high-rises, from which pour mobs of college students headed for our embassies with kindling and Bics. Mickey, Donald, Goofy to the rescue! Give us hope! Give us joy! Give us funny mouse ears, anyway, to wear while we man the ramparts of civilization. Alas, it's not to be. Walt is dead. And, after a couple of hours at Epcot, you'll wish you were, too.

(Mark once described the Epcot Center as follows:

"[If the] 'Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow' really is a prototype community of tomorrow, we have a pretty weird future ahead of us! After working all day under a beautiful dome--where your job is sitting on a sort of open train listening to some industrial giant tell you everything it's doing for you, you'll return home to your modest half-scale mock-up of China's Temple of Heaven, pick up the spouse and kiddees, go out for some really bad Japanese food, and take in a show about the wonders of Canada that will completely surround you, but you will have to stand up through. George Orwell in his worst nightmare never... Well, you get the idea."

so you can see where I might think O'Rourke was right on the money!)

It is the Beirut piece that is the jewel of the book. O'Rourke is full of useful information, just the sort of thing one expects from a guidebook:

"There are a number of Beirut hotels still operating. The best is the Commodore in West Beirut's El Hamra district. This is the headquarters for the international

press corps. There are plenty of rooms available during lulls in the fighting. If combat is intense, telex Beirut 20595 for reservations. The Commodore's basement is an excellent bomb shelter. The staff is cheerful, efficient and will try to get you back if you're kidnapped."

This section describes hotels and restaurants, as one would expect from a travel guide. Many of the sections do not--on the whole one would have to say that this is less a guide for the traveler as a log for the non-traveler, or at least the non-traveler-to-these-places. O'Rourke describes rioting in Seoul, Christmas in El Salvador, chasing illegal aliens at the Mexican border, night life in Warsaw, watching the America's Cup Race (when you don't know anything about boats, including the front from the back), Harvard's 350th anniversary, and driving anywhere in the Third World (which from his description could easily include Manhattan).

In case it isn't obvious: I loved this book! Of course, it is true that O'Rourke's writing verges on bad taste, but it's not clear how one writes about travel to the places he is describing w i t h o u t being in bad taste. What can one say about tourism in Beirut that would pass muster with Miss Manners?

ROGER & ME

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: A biting documentary about the destruction GM does by closing plants in Flint, Michigan. It is razor-sharp and bitter. Moore's film is a compilation of footage he took and pieces from stock footage, documentaries, television, etc. Moore rarely has to use narration to tell the audience the point of a sequence; the point is clear from the footage he chooses. The film has a very effective documentary style. Rating: high +2.

Michael Moore will likely turn out to be a flash in the pan. He has a lot to say about a subject he has been intimately involved with, but it seems unlikely there is any other subject he will be able to make another film about with such wit and insight. But the film he did make may be a real shot in the arm for documentary filmmaking. How long has it been since a documentary has made it to first-run popular (as opposed to art) theaters? R _ o _ g _ e _ r & _ M _ e has, and with very few overt jokes, it is one of the funniest films of the year. It seems amazing that by filming a true story as it actually is happening Moore could have come up with a film at once as funny and as sad as R _ o _ g _ e _ r & _ M _ e, but that is the power of the documentary film maker and editor.

R _ o _ g _ e _ r & _ M _ e is Moore's funny, bitter account of the decline of Flint, Michigan, due to its plant closings, and of Moore's own attempts to interview Roger Smith, the chairman of General Motors. Smith clearly

did not want to be interviewed by Moore and it is easy to understand why. Moore's interviews turn everyone he talks to into patsies. So time after time, Smith--or people who work for Smith--foil Moore's attempts at an interview and they become the film's running gag. Happening once or twice it would look like daily business, but when Moore is foiled time after time Smith just ends up looking worse and worse. And just as surely as we occasionally have national heroes, Moore has succeeded in making Roger Smith a national villain.

But the film is more than just an indictment of Smith or even of the auto industry. Moore has captured on film Middle America with every pimple and pore showing. He shows hare-brained schemes for reviving Flint, such as the GM-built theme park Autoworld, built under the assumption that if GM is in love with cars, the whole country is in love with cars. It featured a puppet auto-worker singing love songs to a robot assembler which Moore notes will replace him. GM brought in celebrities such as Pat Boone, Anita Bryant, and Robert Schuller to spread messages of silly optimism. "Turn your hurt into a halo," Schuller advises with as straight a face as Schuller ever has. When people are in real trouble there is little that can be said to make it

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better and Moore's camera zooms in on the foolishness of trying to fix things up with mere words. One woman becomes an Amway distributor and seems to have gone off the deep end on somebody's theory that everybody has a "season of color" like a zodiac sign, and you must get cosmetics and clothing in colors determined by your season of color. The theory sounds like Elizabeth Arden meets New Age thinking. Another woman goes into raising rabbits for pets or meat and cheerfully kills and flays a rabbit for the camera.

GM also gets "The Newlywed Game"'s Bob Eubanks, who fails from Flint, to come to town and tell people how great Flint is. While Moore is doing a number on Roger Smith, Eubanks is doing a number on himself that could be just as bad.

While I do not have any particular respect for somebody who is a black belt at karate, I can respect a perfectly placed karate kick. While I do not always respect Moore's methods, his film is a perfectly placed kick to the auto industry and all those who support it. This is not fair documentary filmmaking, but it is entertaining and it is

effective. It has precisely the effect on the audience that it was intended to have. I would give it a high +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.