

A few weeks ago, as I was clipping the newest coupons, a phrase caught my eye in the editorial column that filled the free space around the ad: "science fiction." The column reported that awards for the best science fiction stories by hitherto unpublished

THE MT VOID

Page 2

writers were going to be presented in a ceremony held in the United Nations Building. Noted sf author and editor Algis Budrys would be the presenter. The winning stories would later be published as part of a series of books that has become the best-selling sf anthologies ever. The most recent volume is called L. RON HUBBARD PRESENTS WRITERS OF THE FUTURE 5.

I was perplexed. How come I had never heard of or seen any of the five best-selling sf anthologies ever? Why the U.N. Building--some bizarre publicity stunt? Why would Algis Budrys, a respectable writer, let himself get mixed up in this? And finally, although I have steeled myself to seeing Isaac Asimov or Arthur C. Clarke or Steven Spielberg "present" works that they had little or nothing to do with, L. Ron Hubbard is, like, *dead*. As far as I knew, even when he was alive his major efforts went into creating fictional science (Dianetics) rather than science fiction.

At the next LZ meeting, I raised these questions and was surprised to learn that L. Ron Hubbard did write some well-regarded sf, that he did found and fund a quarterly contest for new and amateur writers, that the judges are prominent professional authors, and that the resulting anthologies have indeed sold very well.

The next time I visited a used book store, of course, there they were staring at me from the shelf. I picked up volumes 1, 2, and 5.

The first thing I read was "About the Editor" in vol. 1, because the editor, Algis Budrys, was mentor and contributor to the fanzine I put out as a teenager. At that time we both were living in the same town, and he had just made the transition from writing letters to the editor of Planet Stories to selling fiction to Astounding. (In fact, he used my fanzine's name, Infinity, in one of his Astounding stories.)

Curiosity about my erstwhile friend satisfied, I moved on to the first "About the Author," introducing Michael D. Miller. "Miller has a degree in philosophy," it said, "but has always been intrigued by writing. He has worked for AT&T the past eight years." How about that! "For almost two years, he has been a writer in the public relations department at Bell Laboratories [!], where SF over the years has been a major interest of many. (Retired director John R. Pierce was known as 'J. J. Coupling' to readers of Astounding Science Fiction magazine during the Golden Age.)"

Sure enough, Michael Miller is still with AT&T, right here in Red Hill. He has graciously agreed to attend our May 30 meeting and answer any questions about writing sf. Here's your chance!

THE MT VOID

Page 3

Now just a few words about the book that will provide the focus for discussion at that meeting, L. RON HUBBARD PRESENTS WRITERS OF THE FUTURE 5: It consists of 14 stories, illustrated by young artists, plus five essays on various aspects of writing sf, by professionals such as Hal Clement, Algis Budrys, Marta Randall and the imperishable L. Ron Hubbard.

The stories are uniformly well-written, with only occasional lapses from a fully professional level. There's plenty of diversity in subject matter, approach, style, setting, and plot. Overall, I'd say this collection is about as enjoyable and worth reading as a typical Best of the Year, though perhaps lacking the one or two really outstanding items that I usually find in the professionals' books. My favorite here was "The Disambiguation of Captain Shroud" by Gary Shockley (no mention of whether he's related to Bell Labs' Shockley), a slyly amusing millisecond-by-millisecond first-person account by a shipboard computer dealing with a crisis. My least favorite was Marc Matz's "Despite and Still," which managed to combine all the attributes of prince-on-a-quest fantasy that make me dislike most of that genre. (The contest rules originally specified science fiction, but have been amended to include fantasy, perhaps because it's sometimes hard to draw a line between

the two, as with several stories in these collections.)

The essays in WOTF 5 were more informative than those in previous volumes, offering some solid advice to aspiring writers rather than just cheerleading ("Write! Write! Write! And be true to your own unique vision!"). In particular, Hal Clement gives a good rundown on acquiring the hard-science background, and Jane Yolen on writing sf for younger readers ("Do not ever ever refer to any of these books as Juveniles....[If you do, I will] tell the world you are a writer of Seniles!").

2. Every once in a while I like to go back and read some children's literature. Lang's fairy tales are nice, for example. I recommend this to anyone because they are entertaining and well-written. They have a realism missing from adult literature. Children have a realism that is sort of lost along the way when they grow up.

"What's that?" I hear you say out there. You are saying I got that backwards. You are saying that fairy tales are unrealistic and the adult stuff is realistic. Wrongo! Fundamentally there is more realism in fairy tales than there is in the N_e_w_Y_o_r_k_T_i_m_e_s. In fairy tales there are evil people and wicked witches; there is a B_i_g_B_a_d Wolf. (Well, I have to say I am unconvinced that there are bad wolves. Evil requires something that goes beyond a wolf's mind.) But of course as all we adults k_n_o_w, there are no evil people. Right. So we get verdicts like we got in this Bensonhurst killing. The person has "depraved indifference to human life." Now I don't object to the last four words. I mean "indifference to human life" is probably a very good description of what this guy

THE MT VOID

Page 4

has. That says it succinctly. Then they had to ruin it by saying it was depraved. That says to me that it is a psychological condition. The guy has a sort of mental kink.

I put this in the same category of the commonly held belief that Adolf Hitler was insane. Now I don't doubt, number one, that Hitler had some pretty weird ideas about how the world is glued together. He wanted to run a war with astrology and made command decisions based on dreams. That is weird but if you think it is insane you ought to look around you. Millions of other people seem

to believe in astrology and dreams--perhaps even U.S. presidents. That is not a psychological condition; they are just sadly deluding themselves.

But people take the combination of these arcane beliefs and Hitler's nastiness and conclude Hitler was insane. Hitler was supremely selfish, supremely callous to the harm he did others, and supremely vicious. At least to me those traits come pretty close to being the character of human "evil" and are a long way from anything I would call insanity. Hitler didn't just go "a little funny in the head"; that is going too easy on him. Words like "depraved" and "insane" applied in many cases to many people reflect pop-psychology-based false explanations excusing actions that really a_r_e evil.

Mark Leeper
MT 3D-441 957-5619
...mtgzx!leeper

Our civilization is still in a middle state, scarcely
beast in that it is no longer wholly guided by
instinct, scarcely human in that it is not yet guided
by reason.

-- Theodore Dreiser

"Vintage Season" by C. L. Moore
"In Another Country" by Robert Silverberg
Tor Double #18, 1990 ("Vintage Season" copyright 1946, 1973),
ISBN 0-812-50193-4, \$3.50.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
Copyright 1990 Evelyn C. Leeper

When I recently reviewed Tor Double #20, "The Wheels of If" by L. Sprague de Camp and "The Pugnacious Peacemaker" by Harry Turtledove, I said that to the best of my knowledge this was the first of the doubles in which the two halves were connected. Well, it was pointed out that there were at least seven Ace doubles for which this was true, and even one Tor Double--namely #18, in which Robert Silverberg wrote a companion piece for C. L. Moore's "Vintage Season." So I immediately (well, two days later) ran out and bought this one also.

Again, these are more properly called novellas than novels. And again, the newer author gets top billing, though in this case it makes more sense, since the newer piece is not a sequel but a parallel work. Unfortunately, the back blurb on this book for the Silverberg piece contains a spoiler for the Moore work, so don't read it until a_f_t_e_r you've read "Vintage Season."

Reading "Vintage Season" was like going back to my youth, when stories took place in the present and everything was very normal, except for these strange visitors who somehow didn't quite fit in.... Who were they? Where did they come from? It's the sort of thing that was popular on T_h_e_T_w_i_l_i_g_h_t_Z_o_n_e, probably because the sets and costumes were so easy and cheap to get. But these stories managed to give readers a feel for how the mysterious and magical could be waiting for them just around the corner. You didn't need to have a spaceship, or be hooked into a worldwide cyberspace network, or even leave your home town. The next person to come through the door of your store, or pull up to your gas pump, or ask for directions might be "not of this world."

"Vintage Season" is told from the point of view of someone in and from our world. "In Another Country" is told from the point of view of the visitor, and takes place contemporaneously with "Vintage Season" and includes the same cast of characters, though with the main characters of one being the background characters of the other and vice versa. Perhaps the denouement is predictable, especially in the context of some of Silverberg's other works, but getting there is what this story is all about, rather than the "there" itself.

An added bonus is Silverberg's introduction, in which he talks about his admiration for Moore's work and how he went about writing his companion to it. Personally, I would suggest reading this b_e_t_w_e_e_n the two stories rather than before Moore's story for the same reason that I suggest avoiding the back blurbs: it may give too much away. (I have

tried desperately in this review to avoid giving anything away, and as a result I have been slightly misleading in another direction.) As with the previous Tor Double, I recommend this highly. If you haven't read the Moore, you will certainly want this volume, but even if you have, and even if you have the magazine in which Silverberg's story appeared, the pairing makes this a volume to buy.

[Jim Mann reports that Patrick Nielsen Hayden (the editor of the Tor Doubles) says after the next couple (which are already in the works), all Tor Doubles will be formatted with both halves facing front rather than back to back. "Apparently, several of the major book chains can't figure out what to do with these back-to-back books," Jim says. I agree with Jim that I will miss the old style, but agree also that it's a good thing that there will be more doubles. Personally, I will continue to file them with my Ace Doubles, Belmont Doubles, Dell Double Stars, and other Tor Doubles, whether or not they are back-to-back. For a discussion of some of the problems faced by Ace Doubles when they

first came out, read James A. Corrick's D_o_u_b_l_e_Y_o_u_r

P_l_e_a_s_u_r_e:_A_c_e_S_F

D_o_u_b_l_e_s (Gryphon Books, P. O. Box 209, Brooklyn NY 11228; ISBN 0-936071-13-3; \$5.95).]

Yet Another Batch of Skran Mini-Reviews
by Dale L. Skran Jr.
Copyright 1990 Dale L. Skran Jr.

W_i_l_d_C_a_r_d_s_V_o_l_u_m_e_V_I: A_c_e_i_n
t_h_e_H_o_l_e
edited by George R. R. Martin

This book is in strong competition for being one of the worst of the series. It has a lot (and I mean a lot!) of characters going to the Democratic convention in Atlanta as Gregg Hartmann, a.k.a. "Puppetman" makes his run for the Presidency. Some aces work for him, some against him, and some for themselves. The story starts slowly, but builds to a complex and violent conclusion which (it appears) ends forever the menace of Demise and Puppetman.

George R. R. Martin does an excellent job keeping the whole multi-author effort afloat, but the overall concept is getting tired.

M_a_n_f_a_c
by Martin Caidin

Poor authors tend to write the same book over and over from different angles. Here Caidin tries to re-create the magic of C_y_b_o_r_g (a.k.a. "The Six Million Dollar Man") with M_a_n_f_a_c, a powered suit with a

man-like exterior worn by a hopeless cripple. I couldn't get past page 180 -- just lost interest.

_ F _ a _ r _ e _ w _ e _ l _ l _ H _ o _ r _ i _ z _ o _ n _ t _ a _ l
by K. W. Jeter

This is the first book by Jeter I've read, having missed _ D _ r . _ A _ d _ d _ e _ r ,
_ T _ h _ e _ G _ l _ a _ s _ s _ H _ a _ m _ m _ e _ r , _ I _ n _ f _ e _ r _ n _ a _ l
_ D _ e _ v _ i _ c _ e _ s , and _ T _ h _ e _ L _ a _ n _ d _ o _ f _ t _ h _ e _ D _ e _ a _ d . Jeter is
by reputation a cyber-punk writer with a fixation on the grotesque. To
my surprise, _ F _ a _ r _ e _ w _ e _ l _ l _ H _ o _ r _ i _ z _ o _ n _ t _ a _ l is a more or less normal
hard-SF story
about a culture that exists on the sides of an immense arcology.

The major flaws of the book, which is definitely above average, lie in the weakness of the premise (Why was the building constructed? Are there other buildings?) and the weakness of the ending (just not all that convincing). However, if you want to try a new writer, this is a good place to start.

_ D _ e _ a _ d _ s _ p _ e _ a _ k
by Brian Lumley

Here Lumley continues the "Necroscope" series, following the adventures of one Harry Keogh, Necroscope, as he battles Vampires across

time and space. Lumley has solved the problem of Harry being overly powerful (he could speak to the dead, have the abilities of anyone who has died, raise the dead, _ a _ n _ d teleport!) by having his vampire son hypnotize him into forgetting how to use his powers. This expedient allows another 500 pages of action as he struggles against Janos Ferenczy, a vampire with a magical technique that allows him also to raise the dead. By the end of the novel, Harry has recovered his powers at the cost of apparent vampiritic contamination. Janos foresaw that "the most powerful vampire of all" would survive his confrontation with Keogh, but apparently forgot that he was making certain assumptions about who was -- and who wasn't -- a vampire. It appears that Volume V will feature vampire Harry versus vampire Harry Jr., winner takes the

universe.

Lumley write a fair pot-boiler/page turner, but his confused notions of Romanian peasant life and Romanian history should be ignored. Also, this volume lacks the striking color inner cover of the first three volumes.

_ B _ l _ a _ c _ k _ S _ n _ o _ w _ D _ a _ y _ s
by Claudia O'Keefe

This book has the rare distinction of being one of the few that Evelyn Leeper and I both agree is not very good. I stopped reading this unreadable experiment in "thinking cyberpunk" about page 116. If this is the best Damon Knight can do as editor of the Ace Specials series, he should quit before he alienates more readers.

Not recommended at all.

_ D _ r _ e _ a _ m _ s _ o _ f _ S _ t _ e _ e _ l
by Glen Cook
The Fifth Book of the Black Company

At last we get to see if the Lady survived the battle at the end of _ S _ h _ a _ d _ o _ w _ G _ a _ m _ e _ s. She did, and thinking Croaker is dead, decides it is up to her to restore the Black Company and avenge Croaker's death. Cook keeps the kettle boiling with twists aplenty, and the next book promise a battle royal. I keep expecting to get bored with the same series, but I don't. Cook is really a very inventive fellow. Recommended to those following the series and those who like dark fantasy/fantasy war.

_ S _ u _ n _ g _ i _ n _ B _ l _ o _ o _ d
By Glen Cook
Boskone XXVII Book

This book is a not very good, not very interesting Doc Savage pastiche with a magician playing the role of Doc. Glen must have

written this a loong time ago, and _ i _ t _ s _ h _ o _ w _ s . _ N _ o _ t recommended.

_ T _ o _ o _ l _ o _ f _ t _ h _ e _ T _ r _ a _ d _ e
by Joe Haldeman

This is a fairly well thought out suspense story with one SF idea -- a watch that allows the wearer to control anyone who can hear the wearer's commands. Not Hugo material, but a good read. The story makes more sense than my brief description of it, as would be expected from Joe Haldeman.

_ H _ y _ p _ e _ r _ i _ o _ n
by Dan Simmons

This Hugo nominee is well worth the time to read its 481 pages. Without giving anything away, I can state that Simmons displays truly impressive writing skills, giving us some of the best characterization in recent years combined with a genuine sense-of-wonder SF story. I will probably vote _ H _ y _ p _ e _ r _ i _ o _ n first or second on my Hugo ballot.

_ T _ h _ e _ E _ x _ p _ e _ d _ i _ t _ e _ r
by J. Brian Clarke

This fundamentally unbelievable story of first contact could have been written in the 1940s or 1950s, as the author is innocent of all technological and literary innovations since that time. Not the worst book I've read (I did finish it), but not recommended!

_ _ E _ l _ y _ s _ i _ a
_ T _ h _ e _ C _ o _ m _ i _ n _ g _ o _ f _ C _ t _ h _ u _ l _ h _ u
by Brian Lumley
illustrated by Fabian

I was very excited when I saw this book, being a semi-Lovecraftian, and having enjoyed Lumley's Necroscope series greatly. Alas, I found _ E _ l _ y _ s _ i _ a not to my liking. First, the book has some of Fabian's worst work, lacking the detail and sparkle I find attractive in Fabian. Second, the lack of type-setting makes reading difficult. Third, the story is mechanical and uninteresting, a pastiche of every old cliché you've ever seen in fantasy, including the "endless cycle" ending. Not recommended.

_ T_ h_ e_ F_ o_ r_ t_ r_ e_ s_ s_ o_ f_ t_ h_ e_ P_ e_ a_ r_ l
by Michael Moorcock
An all-new novel of Elric

_ T_ h_ e_ F_ o_ r_ t_ r_ e_ s_ s_ o_ f_ t_ h_ e_ P_ e_ a_ r_ l is a competent but not brilliant reprise of Elric. In it, Elric must journey into the land of dreams to find the "Fortress of the Pearl" before a poison administered by an enemy kills him. Along the way he learns some important lessons from a fellow dream-thief in a series of bizarre encounters reminiscent of those in _ I_ n_ f_ e_ r_ n_ o. Recommended for Elric fans and S&S fans.

_ N_ o_ r_ t_ h_ w_ o_ r_ l_ d
by David Drake

I have been a moderate Drake fan for some time, and consider his "Lacy" stories quite good. However, it appeared that as time went on, Drake narrowed his focus more and more tightly on small-unit combat to the expense of everything else. In _ N_ o_ r_ t_ h_ w_ o_ r_ l_ d Drake gets away from small-unit combat for the most part, but unfortunately creates a Chalkeresque adventure that takes place in a variety of unusual pocket universes controlled by god-like beings. Readable, but not especially recommended.

_ D_ r_ e_ a_ d_ B_ r_ a_ s_ s_ S_ h_ a_ d_ o_ w_ s
by Glen Cook

This is the fifth book in Cooks "fantasy-detective" series, featuring hard-boiled Garrett in a magical land. These books are all interesting to read and fairly plausible, but once I'm finished they don't stick in my mind very well. This one deals with a lot of hard characters who are seeking a "Book of Shadows" which will allow its holder to take on a different form for each page of the book. As you might expect, the book is destroyed and the hard characters all meet untimely ends. Recommended for Cook fans.

THE MAHABHARATA
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
Copyright 1990 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: One of the great stories of world literature--fifteen times the length of the B_i_b_l_e--comes to the screen in a supremely boiled-down C_l_a_s_s_i_c_s I_l_l_u_s_t_r_a_t_e_d format. Rating: low +1.

One of the great classics of Western literature is the I_l_i_a_d, an account told in poetry of a great war in which the gods participated. The telling has deep mythic meanings. Virtually the same description applies to the great classic of Indian literature, the M_a_h_a_b_h_a_r_a_t_a. The mammoth poem of 90,000 couplets is told in eighteen volumes and is fifteen times as long as the B_i_b_l_e. It was written roughly around the time the N_e_w_T_e_s_t_a_m_e_n_t was. The story traces the causes and fighting of a civil war in the land of Kurus. The land was captured by the blind man Dhrtarastra. Being blind, he was considered unfit to rule and gave the kingdom to his younger brother Pandu, who ruled for only a short time before returning Kurus to his brother. Each of the brothers had sons, each by supernatural means, and the two sets of cousins grew up together. Each group of cousins eventually claims Kurus. The two groups go to war with each other in spite of the reluctance of Arjuna, the leader of the sons of Pandu, to make war on members of his own family. Sound familiar? Right. This is the war that was the setting for the B_h_a_g_a_v_a_d_G_i_t_a. In fact, the G_i_t_a was adapted into the M_a_h_a_b_h_a_r_a_t_a. (Hey, I'm impressed you picked up on that. You must be a

whole bunch more erudite than you look!)

Peter Brook produced T h e M a h a b h a r a t a as a nine-hour play and as two films, a 321-minute version for television and a 171-minute version theatrical version. Brook's work in film is perhaps a little too similar to his stage work. This is a story that really cries out for spectacle as giant armies fight. Instead Brook puts his camera right into the action so we never see more than a tiny piece of the action.

Doing a story fifteen B i b l e s long in a film, even a film almost three hours, is a feat that is just barely possible and perhaps just a tad misguided. I knew the basic story going into the theater and I still found myself at a loss to remember all the important characters and relationships. Perhaps the proper medium for this film is on videotape that can be stopped and replayed, allowing the viewer to make notes.

This film was funded by an incredible list of organizations including Finnish public television, American public television, Britain's Channel 4, and a bunch more I either did not recognize or cannot remember. Perhaps it was for that reason that Brook has the very odd racial mixture he has in the casting. Presumably the story should

Mahabharata

May 19, 1990

Page 2

be told mostly with Indians. Instead it is told with Indians, Chinese, Blacks, Americans, British, Italians, and probably several more. With most of the characters coming from one family, this is a distraction at best and occasionally adds confusion. And confusion is one thing this telling has in more than sufficient quantities.

It is somehow understating the case to call T h e M a h a b h a r a t a an ambitious failure. To bring a great work of such length to the screen you must cut very, very much more than you leave in. What remains you have to force-feed your audience at a rate faster than most can assimilate it. Many in my audience gave up and there was a notable rash of watch-checking. It is a good introduction to one of the great works of world literature but it is scarcely more than an introduction. The adaptation, written by Jean-Claude Carriere, gives us at once not enough and far too much. As a mix of very good, mediocre, and misguided, I would prefer not to rate it, but if I must, I would give it a low +1.

