

the more original W_h_e_n_G_r_a_v_i_t_y_F_a_i_l_s. However, F_i_r_e stands on its own, and serves as an interesting contrast to the usual assumed "Christian" background of much SF (the characters are all Muslim).
[-dls]

THE MT VOID

Page 2

2. We have already shown one of my three favorite Westerns, T_h_e_M_a_g_n_i_f_i_c_e_n_t_S_e_v_e_n, for the Leeperhouse Film Festival. Now we'll show the other two. Our film festival for Thursday, August 2, at 7 PM is a tribute to the 1950s Western. We will be showing two of the best Westerns of that (or any) decade, but two Westerns that are antipodal opposites. One is about the responsibility to fight; one is a sort of pacifist view of the West. One is a modest black and white film; one is a big brash color Western.

1950s Westerns

HIGH NOON (1943) dir. by Fred Zinneman

THE BIG COUNTRY (1958) dir. by William Wyler

In HIGH NOON Gary Cooper and Grace Kelly lead a cast of many actors in this 85-minute story told in real time about a small-town sheriff who finds he must face four gunfighters. In desperation he turns to the townspeople who have supported him for years, only to find that he can depend solely on himself. The script was written by Carl Foreman, who later wrote T_h_e_G_u_n_s_o_f_N_a_v_a_r_o_n_e. The story was clearly an indictment of the members of the Hollywood community who did not stand behind blacklisted friends and co-workers. Foreman himself was later blacklisted. Dimitri Tiomkin wrote the score and Tex Ritter sang the now-famous "Do Not Forsake Me, O My Darling." The cast includes Thomas Mitchell, Lloyd Bridges, Katy Jurado, Otto Kruger, Lon Chaney, and Henry Morgan.

Five years later William Wyler made one of the great spectacular Westerns, THE BIG COUNTRY. Again there is an all-star cast including Gregory Peck, Jean Simmons, Charlton Heston, Carroll Baker, Burl Ives (who got an Oscar for his role), Charles Bickford, Alfonso Bedaya, and Chuck Connors. Jerome Moross's full orchestral score has itself become a classic and it sounds really good in high fidelity. The film is based on a novel by Donald Hamilton, best known for writing the Matt Helm adventure series. Gregory Peck

plays a sea captain who comes west to marry his fiancée and finds himself caught in the middle of a land war between two patriarchs.

The two films will start on time (well, maybe 7:05) because we have four hours and ten minutes of film even without a break.

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

The desire of one man to live on the fruits of another's labor is the original sin of the world.

-- James O'Brien

The 1990 HUGO Nominees
Copyright 1990 by Dale L. Skran Jr.

One embarks on a listing of your Hugo rankings with great trepidation. At this point, I am inclined to keep my vote entirely secret, since everything I have promoted or endorsed in the past (Kingsbury's C_o_u_r_t_s_h_i_p_R_i_t_e, Vinge's M_a_r_o_o_n_e_d_i_n_R_e_a_l_T_i_m_e, Sterlings's S_c_h_i_s_m_a_t_r_i_x, and Effinger's W_h_e_n_G_r_a_v_i_t_y_F_a_i_l_e_d) has gone over like an over-weight Mesklinite. I have also found that sharp disagreements can arise among friends over Hugo nominees, leading to months of rancor, and a lasting doubt about one another's literary sensibilities. Nevertheless, some hidden force (ego?) compels me to hold forth on my reaction to this year's sterling and not-so-sterling nominees.

NOVEL

Overall, I am well pleased with the nominees, all of which I have reviewed elsewhere (except for G_r_a_s_s). The rankings are:

1. **HYPERION**: Bold, ambitious, cutting, disturbing, and unique, H_y_p_e_r_i_o_n is set apart from the crowd. Even the let-down, sequel lead-in ending, and even worse sequel can't ruin an excellent

novel.

2. THE BOAT OF A MILLION YEARS: Interesting, with a broad sweep of character and history. Future history and past history with a truer ring that almost all SF I've ever read, but unfortunately just a bit more flat than H_y_p_e_r_i_o_n. A worthy #2 and a pleasure to read.
3. A FIRE IN THE SUN: A solid, pleasing detective story that further develops the characters and events of W_h_e_n_G_r_a_v_i_t_y_F_a_i_l_s. Some dislike this because it is a sequel, and I hope it doesn't win a "sympathy Hugo" voted by all those who wished they had voted for the more original W_h_e_n_G_r_a_v_i_t_y_F_a_i_l_s. However, F_i_r_e stands on its own, and serves as an interesting contrast to the usual assumed "Christian" background of much SF (the characters are all Muslim).
4. No award.
5. PRENTICE ALVIN: A readable continuation of the "Alvin Maker" story, but surely not a Hugo-winning book.
6. GRASS: Sorry, I didn't get to it, so no comment. Reputed to be among the worst of the nominees.

NOVELLA

1. TINY TANGO: A well-written, profoundly disturbing story of a woman attempting to survive AIDS in the 90's by controlling her emotional state. I am a bit surprised at myself for voting it

- 2 -

first, since this is a difficult story to like.

2. THE FATHER OF STONES: Lucius Shepard takes us back to the world of the Dragon Griaule and its tortured inhabitants, telling a tale of murder, love, manipulation, and weird cult doings. Not quite spell-binding, but gripping all the same.
3. A TOUCH OF LAVENDER: A well written story of alien refugees on a future Earth. Like "The Mountains of Mourning," it suffers from using the aliens as a representative device rather than something

that might really happen. The SF trappings are not really important to the story, which is more about drug addiction than any SF theme.

4. THE MOUNTAINS OF MOURNING: A good but not excellent Gordon Dickson style military SF coming of age story. A fair read, but it suffers from not requiring any of its SF trappings. It could have happened in the 18th or 19th century and been equally believable.
5. No award.
6. TIME-OUT: I like Connie Willis, and voted "Fire Watch" first for the Hugo. She seems to have adopted a different writing style, that of a fast-paced, breezy SF comedy. Not at all to my taste, nor deserving a place on the Hugo ballot.

NOVELETTE

This was apparently a weak year for novelettes, at least in my judgement.

1. ENTER A SOLDIER, LATER: ENTER ANOTHER: Silverbob once again demonstrates the writing talent and sheer imagination that has given us many past Hugo winners. Here he spins a tale of a simulation-Cortes in an artificial reality that is not quite what it seems.
2. FOR I HAVE TOUCHED THE SKY: Call me stupid, but I was going to put this below no award. I have always found Resnick's series of stories about a group's attempts to re-create an ancient African lifestyle on a space colony profoundly disturbing. Is he really advocating the revolting morality of his main character? Is he some sort of twisted racist bent on showing the hollowness of "black pride?" This year I've decided the answer is neither, and that Resnick is instead intent on showing the logical endpoint of a "back-to-nature" movement and its perverse moral consequences, which he does extremely well.
3. No award (hey, it's a bad year!).

4. DOGWALKER: Somewhat like "Sleepside Story" by Greg Bear, this is an attempt by an author to write in a voice other than the one they have spent most of their lives developing. Dan Simmons can carry this off, others can't. A noble effort, but not Card's best work.
5. EVERYTHING BUT HONOR: A predictable time-travel story about an arrogant professor you know is going to arrive at a bad end from page one.
6. THE PRICE OF ORANGES: Another light time travel story. What is it with bad time travel stories? Why are so many being written? Why are so many being nominated for the Hugo? Do people feel guilty about not having given "Ripples in the Dirac Sea" a Hugo and want to make it up to a class of stories?
7. AT THE RIALTO: Another empty and overly complex story by Connie Willis. Perhaps written at the same time she composed "Time-out."

SHORT STORY

Try not to take this the wrong way, but I didn't vote anything above no award. Some of these stories are interesting and well written, but none are the sort of solid SF that should be nominated for the short story Hugo. The quality of SF ideas in them is sadly lacking. Recently I have been watching the entire 3rd season of STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION back to back, and have been very impressed with the quality of both the SF ideas and the scripts. I especially liked "Survivors," "Hunted," "Vengeance Factor," "High Ground," and "Bonding." It is a little sad that the short story nominees for the Hugo have weaker ideas than a series of STAR TREK episodes.

1. No award.
2. COMPUTER FRIENDLY: Last year, I really hated Eileen Gunn's "Stable Strategies for Middle Management," and I didn't expect to like this story very much either. Much to my surprise, I voted it first! This is not a real SF story - it is satire in the same fashion as "Gulliver's Travels," but for all that it was well written and imaginative. Still, I refuse to put a story which is not really SF above no award, however interesting and well written it may be.
3. BOOBS: Teenage girl becomes werewolf at puberty! Sounds stupid, right? Suzy McKee Charnes lavishes her considerable writing talent on this relatively slight premise, with good results. Unfortunately the story, while interesting and insightful, is simply not the flag-ship SF story that should win the short-story Hugo.
4. THE EDGE OF THE WORLD: Swanwick offers up a weak story about three

teenagers walking down a staircase that extends over the edge of a fantasy world which inconsistently contains both Richard Nixon and Napoleon (not at the same time, though!). Nicely written, but lacking in substance.

5. THE RETURN OF WILLIAM PROXMIRE: A fun piece of fan-fiction concerning a time-traveling William Proxmire's attempts to scotch the space program at its source by cutting short Heinlein's writing career, with the expected disastrous results. Enjoyable for fans, but not a flag-ship SF story.
6. LOST BOYS: A so-so ghost story with a personal afterword by Orson Scott Card. It was fairly obvious all along what was happening, and the idea is far from original.
7. DORI BANGS: Definitely the worst of the lot, Sterling's fantasy retells the characters lives in two alternative universes.

DRAMATIC PRESENTATION

This was a good year for the dramatic presentation award. Basically, all of the nominees I've seen are worthy to win the award, which is certainly not true every year! FIELD OF DREAMS is not rated since I haven't seen it.

1. THE ABYSS: Top notch SF-adventure with excellent actors, including Ed Harris, Elizabeth Mastrantonio, and Michail Biehn. Strong female characters. More and better underwater action than any other film ever made. The single most dramatic rescue EVER on film - and it could happen! Only a weak ending prevents this from being one of the best SF films of all time.
2. BATMAN: A solid, visually impressive re-telling of the conflict between the Batman and his greatest enemy, the Joker. Jack Nicholson steals the show as the Joker, proving that what makes a super-hero is really the existence of super-villains. For once, Hollywood has made a comic-book movie that doesn't snicker at the characters.
3. THE ADVENTURES OF BARON VON MUNCHAUSEN: This complex, story-

within-a-story, typically baffles the audience, but deserves considerable credit for sheer ambition. Basically a super-hero story told in the 18th century, I found it delightful and entertaining.

4. INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE: In a weaker year, this might have come in first. A high-quality action-adventure with an interesting fantasy plot. I especially liked the death-traps that guarded the Grail and the immortal knight. The adventures of young Indie (River Phoenix) are also great fun. Still, this is more of the same in the Indiana Jones series, although a big step up from TEMPLE OF DOOM.

The 1990 ANNUAL WORLD'S BEST SF
DAW, 1990, ISBN 0-88677-424-1, \$4.50.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
Copyright 1990 Evelyn C. Leeper

"Alphas" is the usual sort of hard-sf story that one expects from Gregory Benford. This one is seemingly inspired by "The Tachypomp" by Edward Page Mitchell, and although it is intriguing from a science point of view, the main character is little more than a place-holder and the ending seems patently self-congratulatory (not of Benford per se, but of the science-inclined in general).

Brian Stableford's "The Magic Bullet" examines biology rather than physics, but is another hard-science story, this time with more emphasis on the characters. Stableford does not slight the plot, however, and provides a satisfactory, if incomplete, ending.

"North of the Abyss" by Brian W. Aldiss uses the Egyptian gods as characters. But if you're expecting anything resembling Zelazny's
_ C _ r _ e _ a _ t _ u _ r _ e _ s _ o _ f _ L _ i _ g _ h _ t _ a _ n _ d
_ D _ a _ r _ k _ n _ e _ s _ s, think again; Aldiss takes a much more
_ nihilistic view of the universe.

The next story, "Chiprunner," is unusual in that it is only a so-so story from Robert Silverberg, an author whom I had thought incapable of writing only so-so stories. But even Jove nods, as they say, and I

found Timothy's desire to merge with his microchips not very believable.

James Morrow's "Abe Lincoln in McDonald's" includes alternate history _ a _ n _ d time travel (Lincoln somehow travels forward in time to see the results of making a particular decision). I feel the use of both techniques lessens the story, 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.

"Death Ship" by Barrington J. Bayley is another (forward) time travel story, though much different than Morrow's. But the ideas in it seem old, and it never really takes off.

Lisa Tuttle's "In Translation" appears to have been heavily inspired by _ C _ l _ o _ s _ e _ E _ n _ c _ o _ u _ n _ t _ e _ r _ s _ o _ f _ t _ h _ e _ T _ h _ i _ r _ d _ K _ i _ n _ d in its story of what happens _ a _ f _ t _ e _ r humans are drawn to the aliens' landing sites. Unfortunately, it all seemed fairly humdrum to me.

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

Judith Moffett's "Not Without Honor," with its aliens drawn to Earth by their idolization of the Mickey Mouse Club, seems more a paean to "the good old days" than the Mickey Mouse Club warrants. (Though since I was never watched it--our television did not get UHF and NBC was not on VHF--I am perhaps not the best person to judge.)

"Dogwalker" by Orson Scott Card has been nominated for a Hugo (the only story in this anthology which has--Judith Moffett's "Not Without Honor" is not to be confused with George Alec Effinger's "Nothing But Honor" which _ w _ a _ s nominated for a Hugo). I liked it, but many people I know didn't.

Lucius Shepard's "Surrender" is part of Shepard's _ o _ e _ u _ v _ r _ e set in Central America, though more based in the hard sciences than most.

Though Shepard carries it off as well as possible, it nonetheless suffers from an unfortunate resemblance to many grade-B science fiction movies to its basic plot.

To those who claim I don't like J. G. Ballard, I offer his "War Fever" as a counter-example. Well-written and engrossing, it serves as much as Ballard's response to Isaiah II:4 as a commentary on the "detached scientific outlook."

My overall evaluation is, unfortunately, negative--unfortunately, because I found previous years' anthologies in this series excellent. The usual introductions for the stories are missing due to Wollheim's poor health (which one hopes is only temporary), and even the selection is disappointing. While this book may be worth the \$4.50, I don't think calling it the "best" is quite accurate.

REDSHIFT RENDEZVOUS by John E. Stith
Ace, 1990, ISBN 0-441-71145-6, \$3.95.

Some of us are sick of ... insanely improbable solar systems set up to show how clever the author's celestial mechanics are.

--Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

True enough, but still ... I enjoyed R_e_d_s_h_i_f_t
R_e_n_d_e_z_v_o_u_s. At least, I enjoyed the part that w_a_s the insanely improbable environment; unfortunately, there wasn't enough of it.

The R_e_d_s_h_i_f_t is a ship in which space is warped somehow so that the speed of light is m_u_c_h slower than in the "real" universe--ranging from 1750 meters/second to 5,360,000 meters/second. (The "real" speed of light is 300,000,000 meters/second.) Stith plays a lot of games with the ramifications of this, and this is the fun part. Unfortunately, partway into the novel the action is moved to Xanahalla, a planet in normal space where there is an evil religious empire and a bunch of thieves who are trying to loot the treasury, and the plot is reduced to that of a super-spy novel. One of the key elements to the resolution of the plot is the result of an extremely unlikely artistic decision on the part of the villains (this will make sense if you read the book), and of course much turns on people misunderstanding the effects of the "redshift phenomenon."

The real point of the novel can be found in Stith's own comments in his afterword, "Inventing the R_e_d_s_h_i_f_t." (The existence of this afterword a figure, three tables, and an appendix "Phenomena Aboard the R_e_d_s_h_i_f_t" merely enforces the idea that the insanely improbable environment was the point.) Stith says:

I know what you're saying. You're saying, "You can't fool me. He just made up all that stuff. There isn't really a Xanahalla, is there, Virginia?"

Maybe. Maybe not. But I didn't invite you here to talk about Xanahalla. Let's talk about the R_e_d_s_h_i_f_t.

It appears that Stith himself agrees that the main point of the book is the R_e_d_s_h_i_f_t itself--all the rest is frills. And as a nifty exercise in "what if?" it is certainly enjoyable, though Stith doesn't seem to deal with what the change in speed of light would do to Einstein's equation. If energy is directly proportional to the square of the speed of light, then dropping the speed should drop the innate energy as well. He d_o_e_s, however, deal with neural transmissions. If you're looking for something more than this sort of scientific game, you will probably be disappointed.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT ALMOST BLANK

ARACHNOPHOBIA
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
Copyright 1990 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: This film has a plot that has been done to death in the past and occasionally better. Still, my spider sense tells me that it may do well with a new generation of viewers who may not be so familiar with its predecessors. Rating: +1.

One tends to expect new ideas in films from Steven Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment. And with Disney Enterprises starting a new film branch, Hollywood Pictures, you would expect something fairly original to inaugurate the new label. That makes it all the more puzzling that this collaboration between Amblin Entertainment and Hollywood Pictures would be a plot that was already old when Spielberg made C_l_o_s_e E_n_c_o_u_n_t_e_r_s_o_f_t_h_e_T_h_i_r_d_K_i_n_d. There have already been so many "Invasion of the Killer Vermin" films that one more is no novelty. In other films we have seen people threatened by infestations of spiders, ants, birds, slugs, rats, bats, feral dogs, bears, even frogs. (Don't ask me how you make a threat out of a frog; I saw the film and still don't know. You have to be pretty desperate for phobias to make a film about killer frogs!) However well a new film of this type is done, and A_r_a_c_h_n_o_p_h_o_b_i_a was nicely executed, there is not much new you can put in a film about a small town threatened by an infestation of deadly spiders.

The idea of the film is that there is a prehistoric breed of

spider--one with a very different social structure from what modern spiders have--living isolated in the jungles of Venezuela. This breed of spider has a "king" and a bunch of drones, much like bees have with a queen and drones. That is something of a stretch since spiders are much more closely related to sea crustaceans than they are to insects. A plot device that could have been devised by Rube Goldberg takes the king spider and drops him (quite literally) into the backyard of a new doctor in a small California town. Dr.~Ross Jennings (played by Jeff Daniels) has a bugaboo about spiders and the fact that he has a barn full of them is only one of the many problems he is facing as a result of moving to Canaima, California, from San Francisco. There are, in fact, many elements of the plot that executive producer Steven Spielberg might have found extremely familiar. We have one lone man, who is not really accepted by his town, who has to convince disbelieving officials that they have a problem. He has his own phobias to overcome, but the love of his family, charmingly portrayed, convinces him that he has to overcome his fears and see that the problem gets solved. Luckily he has a knowledgeable expert he can call on to help him out and to explain to the audience how scary the situation really is. Surely all this must have rung a bell somewhere in Spielberg's memory.

Arachnophobia

July 22, 1990

Page 2

What is nice about the film is that it takes the time to develop characters so that the audience has some understanding and empathy invested in them. That too makes the film seem as if it were really a 1970s film. The viewer gets to know the people who are threatened by the spiders--not as well as you get to know the Brodie family in j_ a_ w_ s, but far better than you know anyone in most current horror films. Nobody follows the new popular formula of being introduced and making vacuous or stereotyped conversation, then being quickly dispatched to nobody's regret.

The effects work usually is believable, though occasionally a spider just does not scramble right. A fair number of live spiders were also sued and unfortunately the film bears no endorsement of the filming practices by any humane society.

A_ r_ a_ c_ h_ n_ o_ p_ h_ o_ b_ i_ a is entertaining and has some genuinely creepy moments, but lacks anything that really distinguishes it from other films with very similar plots and approaches. I give it a +1 on the -4

to +4 scale.

QUICK CHANGE
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
Copyright 1990 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: The clever heist story fades into a Murphy's Law sort of getaway. Three thieves find out just how unfriendly New York City can be. There are several well-defined characters created, but unfortunately the three main characters are not them.
Rating: +1.

There are really two stories to Q_u_i_c_k_C_h_a_n_g_e. The first story is about twenty minutes long and is the story of "The Bank Robbery." The second story is the story of "The Getaway." The idea behind the robbery is clever. It is done in a way that has not been done in heist films before it. I figured the gimmick out in advance, but I am told that puts me in a minority. Word-of-mouth indicates that many viewers are taken by surprise by the gimmick of the robbery. The Getaway is also well done but in a very different vein. All the clockwork planning falls apart as three partners in crime try to get from a New York bank to JFK airport. Here no new ground is broken. Several films have been made about what a hostile and frustrating place New York City is.

Notable examples are T_h_e_O_u_t_o_f_T_o_w_n_e_r_s and A_f_t_e_r_H_o_u_r_s_Q_u_i_c_k_C_h_a_n_g_e is slightly lower key and more believable than those films, but it too is a compendium of the irritating frustrations and rude people in New York City, woven together by a connecting story. The attempts to get to the airport become more frantic as more and more obstacles fall into the intrepid gang's way.

Bill Murray co-produced, co-directed, and co-starred. Howard Franklin co-directed as well as wrote the screenplay based on a book by Jay Cronley. Murray plays the absurdly laid-back Grimm. Murray sacrifices much of the absurd gamut of frustrations by maintaining an even keel throughout. As a counterpoint, Randy Quaid plays Loomis, who constantly walks the narrow line between panic and hysteria. Of the three thieves, the only character who has any depth is Geena Davis's Phyllis, who is re-evaluating her future while they fight their way to the airport, pursued by the slightly too intuitive Chief Rotzinger (played by Jason Robards, Jr.).

Q_u_i_c_k_C_h_a_n_g_e does have a few belly laughs, but it is not trying constantly to be uproarious as so many current comedies are. More often it contents itself with being whimsical and sly. This approach would normally require a much better definition of the three main characters than Franklin was able to provide, but ironically it is not the main characters he develops. Instead he develops the minor characters and then lets them upstage the stars, We better understand a bank guard (played by Bob Elliot of the Bob and Ray team) than we do either if the two male leads. The audience has less sympathy and interest invested in

them than in a cabbie who speaks and understands no recognizable language. An officious bus driver (played by Philip Bosco) is as well developed as Randy Quaid's character with far less screen time. By blurring the foreground characters and focusing on the background, New York City becomes the real main character of the film until the script falters near the end and Murray once again reclaims the audience's attention. I rate the film a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

