

He gets on camera and says, "That ... is ... right.... I ... get ... a ... close, ... clean ... shave every ... time ... with ... the ... Gillette ... Ultra ... Track ... razor.... I ... wouldn't ... say that ... if ... it ... was ... not ... true."

THE MT VOID

Page 2

Then we get the fake testimonial ads. Here they show you people who have spent hours in makeup to get a polished but natural look getting all excited when they hear for the first time how "wonderful" the S_p_o_r_t_s_I_l_l_u_s_t_r_a_t_e_d offer is. It used to be bad enough when they gave you a cassette of fifty minutes of guys getting kicked in the head so they are fit only to make shaving ads. Now they've taken to cutting into my company's profits by giving out football-shaped telephones which our made-up amateur goes ecstatic over. "Wow! You mean I get 52 issues including the softcore-porn swimsuit issue, and this nifty telephone for only two dollars an issue. Boy, I sure hope Marge is watching." Let me tell you. If there is a Marge, which I strongly doubt, she is going to see this ad so many times she'll get nauseous when it comes on. I know I do.

Then there are the guilt ads. "Bobby works so hard mowing the lawn and painting the fence. I really owe him something nice. I'm going to buy him that canned spaghetti." That's the guilt-to-your-kids pitch. The kid they show you is a myth. The last "good kid" like that was born in 1955. The other kids in the neighborhood got so sick of their parents using him as a good example that they torched the little zombie's house in 1969. It was in all the papers. Besides, be informed that n_o_b_o_d_y likes canned spaghetti. Getting canned spaghetti is just what Bobby deserves.

But the ad worked and we saw the guilt-to-your-dog pitch. The ad told you how hard your dog works protecting your house, being affectionate to your children, blah, blah, blah. Well, the vast majority of American dogs sleep eighteen hours a day and don't work hard at anything because we don't give them anything to do or even think about. I think of dogs as being pretty intelligent, but the best argument that they must have pea-sized brains is that more don't go stir-crazy. If they deserve being felt guilty about it is

because of all the things they don't do, not because of all the things they do do.

But the ad that set me off this morning told me how my moustache goes with me everywhere, through hot and cold. And how it deserves better than just a scissors cut--it deserves its own trimmer. Look, I raised my moustache from a pup, but I am darned if I am going to start feeling guilty toward it. I mean, without me it's nothing--just a pile of hair on the carpet. My friends tell me it doesn't do a thing for me, and I am sure not going to buy a gift for it for it. Okay, Madison Avenue, ain't that a kick in the head!

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

A PURSUIT OF MIRACLES by George Turner
Aphelion, 1990, ISBN 1-875346-00-7, A\$12.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
Copyright 1990 Evelyn C. Leeper

Question: What country has as many English speakers as Canada, has hosted two World Science Fiction Conventions, has produced one of the definitive reference works on science fiction, and s_t_i_l_l gets forgotten when people talk about science fiction authors? Answer: Australia. So as you might expect, George Turner, an Australian science fiction author, is virtually unknown in the United States. If this collection of eight stories, published by a small press in Adelaide, is any indication, someone should do something about this.

The title story, "A Pursuit of Miracles," is set in a future mixing two classic science fiction ideas: "non-legals" (artificial humans) and telempathy. This is probably the best-known story as well, as it was commissioned by Terry Carr for one of the U_n_i_v_e_r_s_e anthologies. "Not in Front of the Children" looks at the old adage that "death [and age] is the only obscenity" through a science fictional approach by postulating

a future society in which this is true. "Feedback" is a marvelous exercise in solipsism, as convoluted as any labyrinth. "Shut the Door When You Go Out" is sort of Thomas Wolfe ("You can never go home again") meets Gaia, but a bit short and insubstantial. (Turner says it was done in a single night. As someone else told him, it reads like it, but there's a place in the world for pieces like this as well.)

"On the Nursery Floor" looks at supermen. The influence of such works as Olaf Stapledon's O_d_d_J_o_h_n and Philip Wylie's G_l_a_d_i_a_t_o_r seems obvious, and though Turner's story is well-written, it doesn't add anything new to this genre.

"In a Petri Dish Upstairs" is a typical space station rebellion story, but also a carefully drawn picture of the sort of insulated (and insular) society that could develop in an orbital colony. I find it interesting to speculate on how much Australia's own history, isolated from much of the rest of the world for so long, was drawn upon for this story. Certainly part of what makes Turner's stories attractive is their different perspective.

"Generation Gap" (as Turner says) has been workshopped by two different groups who couldn't agree on what it was or what to do with it. I agree with them--there may be some valid observations on art and artists here, but they're buried.

"The Fittest" is the "germ story" of Turner's novel T_h_e_S_e_a_a_n_d_S_u_m_m_e_r, though he claims the novel is not nearly as depressing as the book. (Undoubtedly the novel is also published only in Australia, so I can't say.) It is technically the most ambitious of the stories in this

volume, with multiple points of view, and Turner handles them well. It is also, I think, uniquely Australian in its treatment of evolution, isolation, and the connectedness of the two.

On the whole this is a rewarding collection. While perhaps not every Australian author writes differently from American or British authors, Turner does, and v_i_v_e_l_a_d_i_f_f_e_r_e_n_c_e!

Whether this book is available in the United States is not clear. L_o_c_u_s reviewed it, so I suspect some specialty stores would have it,

though you're more likely to find it on the West Coast than the East (for obvious geographic reasons). In any case, you can write the publisher: Aphelion Publications, P. O. Box 619, North Adelaide, S. A. 5006, AUSTRALIA. Unfortunately, they don't take credit cards, so send either a check in Australian pounds or do what I did and send cash (A\$12.95 is about US\$10). (They say their bank can also handle checks in United States dollars, but over a certain amount there is a service charge. Personally, in the many years that my family has been sending mail, we've never had a letter lost--and this includes thrice weekly letters to various other countries. So I'm perfectly willing to put a \$10 bill in an envelope with a letter and hope for the best.)

=====

HEATHERN by Jack Womack
Tor, 1990, ISBN 0-312-85078-6, \$16.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
Copyright 1990 Evelyn C. Leeper

This is a well-written book about an unpleasant world and the rather unpleasant people who live in it. The world is our future, or certainly a possible one. Part of the same series as A_m_b_i_e_n_t and T_e_r_r_a_p_l_a_n_e, this novel does explain the language in the latter that I found so annoying. Of this I had said in my review of T_e_r_r_a_p_l_a_n_e, "Evidently the next major resource crisis is that all the verbs are used up and nouns and adjectives must serve instead. So the characters talk about how someone needs to be hospitalized, or how they curbsided their car. After a while the reader is annoyed by this, and wants to wallslam the book." Well, it turns out this is not a language arrived at by the usual evolutionary process, but rather starts out as a language of the young, "post-literate" crowd. As such it is more similar in origin to the language of A_C_l_o_c_k_w_o_r_k_O_r_a_n_g_e than to a "natural" language. While I personally didn't enjoy the novel, I think those whose tastes run towards gritty futures would.

A TIMELY AFFAIR by Janice Bennett
Zebra Regency Romance, 1990, ISBN 0-8217-2930-6, \$3.95.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
Copyright 1990 Evelyn C. Leeper

Okay, I can hear you already--when did Evelyn start reading romance novels and what is this review doing in a science fiction publication? Well, it's like this....

A_T_i_m_e_l_y_A_f_f_a_i_r is a time travel novel. When I read the (favorable) review in L_o_c_u_s, I decided to give it a try. After all, science fiction is science fiction, and though the person I was with in the bookstore when I bought it pretended not to know me, I persevered. And then every time I opened it, he had some comment to make. But I did read it, and here I am to tell you about it. And right up front I'll say that this book constitutes my entire experience with the romance genre (and the Regency sub-genre in particular), so take my comments as coming from someone with no practical background. I know something a_b_o_u_t the genre, and understand the different time periods that show up in romance novels, and know that the infamous "woman in a long white dress fleeing from the house across the moor with a full moon in the background" is found on Gothic romances rather than Regency ones, and that these days heroines in romance novels are allowed to have sex (whereas twenty years ago this wasn't true, at least not until after they married the man in question), and so on. But I hadn't r_e_a_d any of these. (Or does P_r_i_d_e_a_n_d_P_r_e_j_u_d_i_c_e or T_e_s_s_o_f_t_h_e_d'_U_r_b_e_r_v_i_l_l_e_s count?) Anyway, back to the matter at hand.

The novel's main character, Andrea Wells, is a romance novel fan in current-day Minneapolis. In particular, she is a fan of Regency romances. (Is this product placement for the Zebra line? Well, at least they don't have her reading specific novels in their line.) So much in love with Regency London is she that when she gets fed up with her over-possessive boyfriend, she packs up and heads off to London to visit all the places she's been reading about. (I can relate to this--when we went to London, Mark pointed out where Gorgo came up out of the Thames and where they found the alien spaceship in F_i_v_e_M_i_l_l_i_o_n_Y_e_a_r_s_t_o_E_a_r_t_h, and of course I visited Baker Street.) While there she sees an article in a tabloid about an old manor which fascinates her. When she goes there on a tour, she starts seeing apparitions: ghostly servants dressed in Regency costume, well-dressed nobles, etc. The current resident notices this and decides--on a truly flimsy bit of plotting--that Andrea is just the person to go back in time to find a lost heirloom that will save her from ruin. This is achieved via the same method used in Jack Finney's T_i_m_e_a_n_d_A_g_a_i_n: the time traveler places her- or himself in a room full of objects from the period and wills her- or himself back.

Well, needless to say, it works. (If it didn't, there wouldn't be much story now, would there?) She goes back, meets the man of her dreams, looks for the treasure, etc., etc. This is all clouded by the fact that she knows he will die in a fire in the West Tower on a certain date.

As a time travel story, this is pretty thin. The period details I assume are true to Regency romances, though perhaps not to reality. The L_o_c_u_s reviewer objected to the somewhat heavy-handed social commentary about the harsh conditions of the time. But it's a no-win situation--had the author left it out, her heroine, being a modern woman who should know better, would appear insensitive. But there are a lot of period details missing. True, people in novels seem never to go to the bathroom, but certainly a modern-day woman sent back almost two hundred years could be expected to notice the differences. (For that matter, she is back for several months yet never seems to have to deal with any feminine hygiene issues, to put it as delicately as possible.) A book that does deal with all these questions, by the way, is T_h_e_M_i_r_r_o_r by Marlys Millhiser; readers may find it an interesting comparison. Admittedly Andrea has picked up some information about dress, language, etc., from her reading, but her ability to cope with all the things not mentioned in most romances is a little unrealistic.

Do I recommend this? Well, if you like both genres (science fiction and romance), you would probably like this book. And if you liked Jack Finney's T_i_m_e_a_n_d_A_g_a_i_n, I would recommend this, with the disclaimer that Bennett is not as good a writer as Finney. So if you haven't read Finney, read that first.

MISERY

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Copyright 1990 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: Rob Reiner had a real coup casting unknown Kathy Bates as Annie Wilks in M _ i _ s _ e _ r _ y . But it wasn't good enough to save this from being his most unpleasant and least exceptional film. There are sparks of wit but they do not kindle much warmth. Rating; high 0 (-4 to +4).

Stephen King showed up as advertised at a World Fantasy Convention I attended in Ottawa. I have a review copy of C _ a _ r _ r _ i _ e I found cheap in a used bookstore and I thought this would be a good opportunity to get it autographed. I had no idea the investment of time it would require. The limit was three books per person and even with that limit King could have easily spent twelve hours straight just autographing books for his fans. But the number was not so amazing as the fervor of some of his fans. Some fans scouted at the front of the line to find people who were holding fewer than three books and who could be coerced into getting someone else's book autographed. Now recognize, King is only a reasonably competent writer. But he is a celebrity and every celebrity seems to have a cult of admirers in which a fair percentage carry their adulation to the point of being nuisances. Martin Scorsese's K _ i _ n _ g _ o _ f _ C _ o _ m _ e _ d _ y shows not too unrealistically the fervor of some fans, including King's.

That King knows the extremities of what fans will do and uses it as the basis of a book is hardly surprising. What is a little more surprising is that King would, knowingly or not, combine the idea with a plot that had previously been done on N i g h t G a l l e r y. In the "Marmalade Wine" episode a man, played by Robert Morse, takes refuge from a storm in the secluded house of a lonely surgeon, played by Rudy Vallee. The surgeon seems only too pleased to have a guest he can care for. The visitor finds himself drugged and wakes to the surgeon cheerfully informing him, "I've taken the liberty of amputating your feet. Have some oatmeal." (There are further plot parallels, but revealing them would be a M i s e r y spoiler.)

Well, there you have the basic plot of Rob Reiner's adaptation of the Stephen King novel M i s e r y. James Caan plays Paul Sheldon, author of eight melodramatic books about a heroine named Misery. He mangles himself in a car accident in a Colorado snowstorm and awakes to find himself in the overly loving care of his self-professed "Number One Fan," Annie Wilks. Kathy Bates plays Nurse Wilks, who refuses to share her patient with any hospital and instead cares for him attentively in her own home. Wilks takes the occasion to read the eighth book about Misery. When the Number One Fan finds out Sheldon has killed off Misery, the number two really hits the fan. Sheldon will be held a

Misery

December 8, 1990

Page 2

prisoner until he writes a novel resurrecting Misery. Wilks flashes from adulation to rage to depression. Bates's combination of winning child-like innocence and monstrous menace--perhaps not so far apart--is really what makes the film tick. Caan's flat performance goes almost unnoticed next to Bates. Richard Farnsworth and Frances Sternhagen as a husband and wife sheriff and deputy have some chemistry but not enough screen time really to show it.

It seems as if every popular lead actor in Hollywood will eventually be cast as "the good cop" in an action film and every director in Hollywood will eventually direct a Stephen King horror film. Maybe it only seems that way. But M i s e r y is certainly Rob Reiner's least remarkable film to date. It is hard to imagine that M i s e r y is from the same director who made has a very distinguished set of films including T h e S u r e T h i n g and T h e P r i n c e s s B r i d e. Reiner seems to have

been gambling very heavily on Kathy Bates's performance to set this film apart and make it a Reiner film. Bates was good but not that good.

In the end M i s e r y is a very minor horror film not too different from D e a d o f W i n t e r or several others. My rating would be a high 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.