

Second, I will not be running the fest. I have never even seen the films to be shown. The festival name and the equipment are being borrowed by Dale Skran, who provides us with the following announcement:

THE MT VOID

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An introduction to Japanese animation:

1. Japanese animation is not for little kids (much of it, anyway). Expect violence and sex on at least the level of an American R-rated movie.
2. The "animation" is not up to the best Disney standard. This means that facial motion, etc. is not always highly expressive. However, the artwork is to a much higher standard than typically seen in American animation, especially as it relates to technology.
3. For some reason I do not understand, all characters, especially women, are drawn with abnormally large eyes.
4. Characters often appear to be white Europeans even if the story is set in Japan.
5. Exaggeration of facial expression and emotion is common.
6. Perspective is frequently distorted to enhance an effect or scene.

Most importantly to the SF fans, while American animation focuses on "Smurfs" and other silliness, Japanese animators are producing Cyberpunk and ESPer adventures. One such series shown recently at WORLDCON is titled "Bubble Gum Crisis." I have recently purchased the first five episodes of the series, and propose showing them at the newly renovated Leeperhouse Sunday, February 9th from 1-5 PM.

If the concept of a team of female mercenaries using powered suits operating in a future Mega-Tokyo, and frequently in opposition to immense heartless corporations (and splinter groups within them) against a background of detailed technology, violent military

robots, vampiric androids, ultra-souped up motorcycles, and rock-n-roll seems interesting, by all means come. I'm not saying this is a major artistic achievement. I am saying it beats the hell out of the Smurfs.

REPEAT WARNING: VIOLENCE, BRIEF NUDITY, STRONG LANGUAGE, MORE VIOLENCE. Will never be seen on network TV, etc. I am emphasizing this not because I think anything in this series is stomach-turning, but because "animation" means "for little kids" in the minds of Americans while in Japan it seems largely directed at adults. [-dls]

2. The opinions expressed in the above are those of the author, Mr. Dale Skran, and do not reflect opinions of the MT VOID, me, or Evelyn, or even do they reflect reality. My impression was that Smurfs were a European cartoon, but I do not really know. I do think he sells short animation from the United States, especially

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creative geniuses like the Fleischer Brothers (who created, among other works, the Superman cartoons that strongly influenced Japanese animation). Windsor McCay also broke new ground. Some of Disney is also creative. Some nice American animation shows up each year at the various Tournées. Then, if one is to include Canadian animation as "American" some very fine animation indeed comes from Canada. Not that there is not bad animation from America but Dale's statement seemed a bit harsh. [-mrl]

3. Okay, people, it is time for this country to batten down for a storm. I usually have to wrap these stories in some creative writing. This one is funny and scary enough by itself not to need embroidery. I will just repeat it. National Public Radio was discussing the new Akira Kurosawa film about the bombing of Nagasaki. It is one more case where the Japanese see themselves as the unwilling victims of the Americans in the Second World War. The Japanese do not teach in their schools very much about the causes of the war and have no discussion of whether Japan might have been in the wrong. (Yes, I know there are people who now want to reinterpret 1930s politics so that it is the United States at fault. There are few events in the 20th Century--good or bad--that someone will not attribute to some failing of the American people.)

The report on the film cited a study where high school children across Japan were asked what the first thing was they thought of when they thought of World War II. Their response, in overwhelming numbers, was the atom bomb. They have been trained to think of themselves as victims of the war and they do not know a whole lot more about the war. Then a group of students at a Lawrence, Kansas high school were asked for the first thing they think about when they think of Japan. The overwhelming response was "Tienanmen Square." If this issue is to be resolved, it had better happen soon. In another few years, unilateral intellectual disarmament will have taken its toll and we will not be able to convince anyone.

4. There have been a couple of entries in the time-travel contest. We will probably print the entries in the February 14 issue, so send in any ideas you have before then. [-ecl]

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All the progress we have made in philosophy, that is, all that has been made since the Greeks, is the result of that methodical skepticism which is the first element of human freedom.

-- Charles S. Peirce

Something Wicked This Way Comes
January 92's Mini-Reviews by Dale L. Skran Jr.
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PICKS

D_o_w_n_t_h_e_B_r_i_g_h_t_W_a_y by Robert Reed

This is the first book I've read by Mr. Reed, and I hope not the last. I'm sticking my neck out here, but I think this is Hugo Material. Every time I say a book is "Hugo Material," it seems to be the kiss of death, as it was for N_e_v_e_r_n_e_s_s, C_o_u_r_t_s_h_i_p_R_i_t_e, and S_c_h_i_s_m_a_t_r_i_x, but, once more into the breach.

Reed has written an excellent alternate worlds story. A particular version of humanity discovers that there are alternative worlds, and that, with appropriate technical means, one can travel between them along an artifact they call "the bright way." It apparently connects an infinite number of alternate worlds, with a "right" and a "left" path being possible. The "Founders" decide to split into two groups and follow the "way" in an effort to find the "Makers" who created the "way." That was millions of years ago.

In those millions of years, thousands of alternative Earths have been explored and incorporated into the vast scheme of the Founders. But there are dangers unimaginable, and variants on humanity that pose a threat to even the most advanced technology.

Plausible in both its characters and its technology, D_o_w_n_t_h_e_B_r_i_g_h_t_W_a_y is a major work of SF in 1991. Read it, and nominate it for the Hugo.

H_e_a_d_s by Greg Bear

Bear has written another winner here. It is such a pleasure to read an unpadding short novel that H_e_a_d_s should almost get the Hugo just for not being an immense tome. Rather than a cast of hundreds, H_e_a_d_s has just five characters you'll remember for quite a while. About a hundred years in the future, a Lunar family corporation is seeking to achieve absolute zero. An economical family member decides to purchase a lot of frozen heads, ship them to the moon, and use experimental equipment to read their memories, while storing them near the rather cold absolute zero equipment.

As you might imagine, one of those heads came off a rather significant person, and things start to get interesting. This is not a vast and sweeping novel. It is a small novel with a few characters. Nobody saves the world (indeed, the world is never threatened). Although a lot of the story involves Lunar politics, the story has a

good bit of that old fashioned sense of wonder.

I've heard people rave about this book, and others dismiss it as a slight work. Read it and make up your own mind.

C_o_n_s_i_d_e_r_P_h_l_e_b_a_s by Iain M. Banks

This may seem very odd, but I am going to give a favorable review to a book I haven't actually finished reading. I read to page 291, and then read the background/epilogue in the back. Banks has certainly written a worthy piece of SF. C_o_n_s_i_d_e_r_P_h_l_e_b_a_s follows the adventures of one Bora Horza Gobuchul, a Changer, and an Idiran agent in their battle against the Culture. The Culture is what humanity becomes in several thousand years, and the Idirans a race of alien religious fanatics. Their war, which spans the Galaxy, has much the flavor of the Cold War--vast in scope, ruthless, fought over difficult to define ideological differences.

The technology is plausibly realized, although so advanced that there is little practical difference between this story and some E. E. Smith space opera. Banks writes somewhat like David Zindell (N_e_v_e_r_n_e_s_s), and the book has an ultra-violent, highly gross middle section much like that in N_e_v_e_r_n_e_s_s. However, this is not what stopped me from finishing the book. Ultimately, there is a cold pointlessness to the story, which, while realistic, discouraged me, much in the same fashion as some LeCarre books. I expect to return to this point at some point to finish the story. Recommended to those who like hard science SF, cyberpunk, or SF War stories, but C_o_n_s_i_d_e_r_P_h_l_e_b_a_s rises above simple categorization. The "Culture" and the "Idirans" are worthy conceptualizations of possible futures, richly detailed and vastly interesting. I will be looking for more of Bank's novels.

M_i_d_s_u_m_m_e_r_C_e_n_t_u_r_y by James Blish

It is sometimes supposed by relatively young SF fans that all really interesting SF has been composed in a post-Gibsonian era. This is, of course, nonsense, and a look at Blish's M_i_d_s_u_m_m_e_r_C_e_n_t_u_r_y proves a welcome antidote. The tale concerns one Dr. John Martel, who falls into an advanced electronic telescope, and finds himself, eons later, sharing a computer with something known only as "Qvant." Thus begins a truly epic struggle for survival. Humanity has risen and fallen three times, and now molders away while a race of intelligent birds spread over the world. Little hope remains, and "Qvant" appears demented. Without a body, without any knowledge of his environment, or of the available technology, Martel faces an incredible challenge: to free himself from the computer, find a body, defeat the Birds, and somehow start humanity on the upward trail again. Originally written in 1972 (apparently), the M_i_d_s_u_m_m_e_r_C_e_n_t_u_r_y has aged surprisingly well. I'm not sure who to recommend this to, but I liked it!

FOR THE NARROW INTEREST

D_e_a_d_s_p_a_w_n (N_e_c_r_o_s_c_o_p_e_V) by Brian Lumley

Lumley has kept my interest through all five huge volumes of this multi-tiered pastiche of ERB, vampires, ESP, James Bond, splatter-punk, and Lovecraftian horror. D_e_a_d_s_p_a_w_n follows the further adventures of Harry Keogh, the Necroscope, as he struggles to overcome his vampire enemies before the vampire within him wins out. Promised in the pages of W_e_i_r_d_T_a_l_e_s as "armageddon," Volume V is oddly anti-climactic, although competent and page-turning. The confrontation between Harry and his son was a bit of let-down for me, as was the Lumley-ese circular time-warp ending. Recommended for 1) those who read the first four volumes, and 2) those who like this sort of thing.

S_t_r_a_t_a by Terry Pratchett

Described on the jacket as a parody of R_i_n_g_w_o_r_l_d, S_t_r_a_t_a seems mis-described as a "parody." True, it does involve a mixed group of adventurers exploring an artificial world, but it seems more derivative than a parody. Pratchett has a few new ideas of his own that make the fairly short novel worth the effort. Recommended to those who liked R_i_n_g_w_o_r_l_d, or any sort of off-beat SF adventure.

W_a_r_W_o_r_l_d_I_I: S_a_u_r_o_n
D_o_m_i_n_a_t_i_o_n created by Jerry Pournelle

Pournelle returns us again to "Haven," an exceptionally tough place to live inhabited by an odd collection of colonists that the fleeing Sauron Supermen decided to pick as a hiding place after they lost the Secession War. This is a formula that has been used before. The "hell planet" theme gave us Harrison's "Deathworld" trilogy, and the "mixed combatants" Pournelle's "Janissaries" series.

The stores are acceptable, written by the likes of Harry Turtledove, Susan Shwartz, John Dalmás, and Phillip Pournelle (now, who could he be?). One of my complaints about this series is that although maps are provided, the maps don't seem to mention many of the important places in the stories, and this makes them almost impossible to use.

The title seems inapt, since the Saurons never seem to establish anything most would recognize as a "Dominion." Instead, they seem to be engaged in a planet-sized cat herding exercise, with the cats putting up a good fight, as cats often do. In fact, it is so obvious that the Saurons will eventually lose that you start to feel sorry for them. Actually, lose is perhaps not the right word. Over time, the altered genes that make the Saurons such great fighters are getting into the native Haven population, which gets better at fighting back all the time while the Sauron technology runs down and down. In the end the planet will "defeat" the Saurons but the Sauron genes will most likely survive, and even prosper.

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Overall, this has been an entertaining series, refreshingly free from moralizing on Pournelle's part. Recommended to fans of SF war stories, or combat fiction in general. May be too violent for the faint of heart.

W_i_l_d_C_a_r_d_s_V_o_l_u_m_e_I_X:
J_o_k_e_r_t_o_w_n_S_h_u_f_f_l_e edited by George R. R. Martin

Definitely only recommended for those who have read Volume I-VIII!
The series seems to be drifting into morbid and grotesque themes with the arrival of "bloat." I read it, but my interest is declining.

T_h_e_F_i_r_e_i_n_H_i_s_H_a_n_d_s by Glen Cook
W_i_t_h_M_e_r_c_y_T_o_w_a_r_d_N_o_n_e by Glen Cook

These early Cook works set some of the background for the "Dread Empire" series, including how Haroun and Ragnarson got to be such good buddies. I read them both, and they have the Cook magic--real people fighting real wars making real mistakes while being manipulated by real bastards! Not great books, but entertaining. Recommended for Glen Cook fans, dark fantasy readers, and those who enjoy magical war stories.

T_h_e_J_e_h_o_v_a_h_C_o_n_t_r_a_c_t by Victor Koman

This fantasy tale has an intriguing premise. Del Ammo, the world's best Assassin (he was in on the Kennedy job as a young man) is hired by a certain Reverend Zack, a television evangelist, to kill God. Del

doesn't believe in God, but as Zack says, "You don't have to believe. Just assassinate him." Of course, Zack isn't quite what he seems, and neither is anyone else. Unfortunately, the explosive premise is wasted with trite fantasy ideas and a fairly obvious ending that doesn't address many fundamental questions about God/god. Interesting, but don't put it too high on your list.

_ G _ o _ T _ e _ l _ l _ t _ h _ e _ S _ p _ a _ r _ t _ a _ n _ s by Jerry Pournelle and S. M. Stirling

This novel continues the story of Falkenberg's Legion in the CoDominium universe. Reading the other stories/novels is essential before embarking on this one. Unfortunately, we are not spared the famous Pournellian moralizing here, although "Spartans" is a workman-like (workperson-like?) effort. The Legion has decided to make Sparta its home world, but their enemies are fomenting a rebellion using Mao's Rules of War. Of course, the highly trained Legion inspires the locals, educates the dual Monarchs, and kicks butt. A sequel is _ s _ u _ r _ e to follow--a significant character is in enemy hands at the end of the story.

For a while there, it was starting to look like the CoDominium wasn't just SF--it _ w _ a _ s _ b _ e _ c _ o _ m _ i _ n _ g _ h _ i _ s _ t _ o _ r _ y. I actually saw a State

Department spokesperson _ d _ e _ n _ y that US/Soviet codominium existed (a sure sign that it was just around the corner)! Now that the Soviet Union is no more, it seems less likely, but it is probably Pournelle's major, independent contribution to SF. Now if only he could cut down on the

moralizing

Recommended to Pournelle, Stirling, and SF War fans.

PANS

_ D _ a _ r _ k _ M _ e _ s _ s _ i _ a _ h by Martin Caidin

A sequel to _ T _ h _ e _ M _ e _ s _ s _ i _ a _ h _ S _ t _ o _ n _ e, a novel based on the premise of

a

"magical stone" that allows the holder to control the mind of those who are physically nearby, _ D _ a _ r _ k _ M _ e _ s _ s _ i _ a _ h never really takes off, and then enters the twilight zone with a silly and hackneyed ending. This series has an intriguing premise--if only Caidin could stick with it, and leave the aliens out of the story.

Caidin also has too many bimbos with tight sweaters and manly men with the blue wrists (blue from the martial arts, of course!). What, you've never heard of such a thing? Gee, neither have I, and I have a second-degree black belt in Taekwondo. I didn't finish this and I don't recommend it at all. I'm not sure who even reads this sort of stuff.

_ W _ o _ l _ f _ a _ n _ d _ I _ r _ o _ n by Gordon R. Dickson

This book has gotten some excellent press, but round about page 137 I started to lose interest. The tale deals with a mathematician who survives the collapse of civilization, and then befriends a wolf. Together, they fight their way across North America to safety. This should be a pulse-pounding adventure, but comes over as lame and unrealistic. Recommended only to Dickson and post-holocaust completists.

FREEJACK

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: _ J_ a_ c_ k_ a_ s_ s is more like it. Violent, ugly, stupid, and boring sci-fi chase film, purported based on Robert Sheckley's _ I_ m_ m_ o_ r_ t_ a_ l_ i_ t_ y, _ I_ n_ c., though actually borrowing just an idea or two. _ F_ r_ e_ e_ j_ a_ c_ k exemplifies everything that is going wrong with current big-budget science fiction films. Rating: low -2 (-4 to +4).

Robert Sheckley, already known for short stories in 1958 when he published his first novel. _ I_ m_ m_ o_ r_ t_ a_ l_ i_ t_ y, _ I_ n_ c. had a science fiction style but was actually a fantasy story based on the idea that in some cases the soul does survive when a person dies and that souls can be transplanted to new bodies. In the novel Thomas Blaine crashes his car on the New Jersey Turnpike late one night in the year 1958 and finds his soul transplanted into an unfamiliar body in the year 2110. If all this sounds familiar, you did _ n_ o_ t get it from seeing the new supposed film version _ F_ r_ e_ e_ j_ a_ c_ k. In fact, there is only an idea or two that Freejack may have borrowed from _ I_ m_ m_ o_ r_ t_ a_ l_ i_ t_ y, _ I_ n_ c. and a few more borrowed, uncredited, from John Varley's _ M_ i_ l_ l_ e_ n_ n_ i_ u_ m (or perhaps the film version of that story). But, okay, so _ F_ r_ e_ e_ j_ a_ c_ k is not a good adaptation. Is it at least a good movie? And the answer is "No, _ F_ r_ e_ e_ j_ a_ c_ k is a _ t_ e_ r_ r_ i_ b_ l_ e movie."

Cut off about ten minutes at each end and the film is one long chase story set on a futuristic background that makes no sense for any year as near as its 2009.

Emelio Estevez plays Alex Furlong, a race car driver who is plucked from a fiery crash and thrown into the super-violent and incredibly run-down world of 2009. It seems that there is a huge corporation that wants Furlong's body. His mind they have no use for. And for about the next ninety minutes you won't need your mind either. Of course, there is something of a mystery going on in this future world. But it is the sort of mystery intended to give the audience the cheap thrill of saying, "Aha! I knew it all along!" If you are surprised at who is pulling all the strings, perhaps you deserve this film.

The set direction at best looks like a cheap-jack version of _ B_ l_ a_ d_ e_ r_ u_ n_ n_ e_ r, and at times looks as if they had just filmed in any slum they could find. This view of the world eighteen years hence is neither original nor imaginative. _ B_ l_ a_ d_ e_ r_ u_ n_ n_ e_ r's art director would look at every object in a scene and redesign just enough to give you the feeling time had passed. The parking meters would be completely redesigned, for example. The closer you looked, the more interesting detail you saw. Not so here. There is no quality in

the set design. The equivalent here is redesigning a delivery truck to make a product placement more evident. Most of the cars of the future look either like cars of the 1980s, cars of the 1980s with big fiberglass shells over them to disguise them. One of my pet peeves is a script that makes calendar mistakes. (There is a number trick for figuring what days dates fall on.) And any almanac should have told a scriptwriter who cared that November 23, 2009 falls on a Monday, not a Thursday. In another scene we meet what is apparently a homeless man who must eat river rat. It would not be a bad little detail but for the fact that inside the grungy clothing he has a neatly trimmed beard and smooth, shaved cheeks.

Casting is another place where the film falls flat. Emelio

Estevez, who has not had a decent film since T_h_e_B_r_e_a_k_f_a_s_t
C_l_u_b,

just looks too young and does not have the acting power for this role. Mick Jagger plays Vacendak, a hired killer and the head of a private security army. There is absolutely nothing about him that adds anything to Vacendak that was not in the script. The best that can be said is that he does not detract from the role. We might expect that, since Jagger has little acting experience. But what is surprising is that Anthony Hopkins apparently chose just to act his role as a corporate executive and to put nothing extra in it. Either director Geoff Murphy did not let Hopkins do much or Hopkins was just simply uninspired.

Overall, we have a film with no characters and no core. In their place we have chases and gunfights. The producers didn't even have the sense to borrow what was good about the novel it claims to be based on. I give F_r_e_e_j_a_c_k a low -2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

(The novel has been published as I_m_m_o_r_t_a_l_i_t_y, I_n_c. and earlier in a shorter form as I_m_m_o_r_t_a_l_i_t_y_D_e_l_i_v_e_r_e_d. It was serialized in

G_a_l_a_x_y magazine October 1958 to February 1959 under the title T_i_m_e
K_i_l_l_e_r. It is currently available in a movie tie-in edition as
F_r_e_e_j_a_c_k, though the novel itself has no reference to the term
"freejack" nor to jacks of any kind.)

FRIED GREEN TOMATOES
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: Fannie Flagg's novel is really two stories told at the same time. A modern Alabama woman finds her identity through a relationship with an older woman who tells her a story of Alabama in the 1930s. However, neither story has time to be fully developed. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4).

"Fried Green Tomatoes" is the name for two different recipes. One is a Southern dish I have never tried but it is reputedly delicious--it looks a lot like fried eggplant. It is also the name for a stew or goulash made from pieces of old movies about the South, and politically correct films about women learning to be independent. It is sweetened with little bits of comedy thrown in and there is a dash of bittersweet tragedy. The recipe apparently calls for two small storylines rather than one big one. This dish turns out to be palatable, even enjoyable, though a little light for my taste. Its flavor was just a little over-familiar and it left me hungry for just a bit more.

The film opens with a truck being dredged from an Alabama river

in the late 1930s. We then flash forward to what may be the present or what may be a decade or so back. (We do eventually find out why the truck is important, but it is questionable why we open with that scene.) Evelyn and Ed Couch (played by Kathy Bates and Gailand Sartain) find themselves passing through the little town of Whistle Stop on the way to a nursing home to visit Ed's cantankerous aunt. (The name "Couch" was chosen, no doubt, because Evelyn and Ed are each a bit over-stuffed.) AT the nursing home Evelyn meets Ninny Threadgoode (played by Jessica Tandy) and the two begin to talk. Ninny tells Evelyn a story of the past in Alabama. On repeated visits that story becomes much longer and, in fact, it is the main body of the film. In flashback we see the story of the life-long friendship of Idgie Threadgoode (played by Mary Stuart Masterson) and Ruth Jamison (played by Mary-Louise Parker). The story develops as parallel plots. One plot is that of Evelyn finding her own identity and getting past her late-mid-life crisis. The other is the story of Idgie and Ruth, two liberated women who run the Whistle Stop Cafe in the small Alabama town of Whistle Stop. The story is nothing greatly original. Not too surprisingly, the issue of racism rears its pointed, hooded head. There is a murder subplot and a lot of human drama in the story of the two close friends. Meanwhile, Evelyn tries to find herself through a "Total Womanhood" program, but finally finds identity through Idgie's and Ruth's liberated example. The film is a sort of adult _ S _ o _ n _ g _ o _ f _ t _ h _ e _ S _ o _ u _ t _ h .

Fried Green Tomatoes January 25, 1992

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Of course the film is not too adult. In Fannie Flagg's original novel, _ F _ r _ i _ e _ d _ G _ r _ e _ e _ n _ T _ o _ m _ a _ t _ o _ e _ s _ a _ t _ t _ h _ e _ W _ h _ i _ s _ t _ l _ e _ S _ t _ o _ p _ C _ a _ f _ e , Idgie and Ruth have a lesbian relationship. In the screenplay by director Jon Avnet and Fannie Flagg, the relationship is down-played and left as a matter for speculation. The real problem with the screenplay is that _ t _ o _ o _ m _ u _ c _ h must have been left out. Spreading the film's 130 minutes between two stories does not leave sufficient time to give either a satisfying telling. This was a light entertaining novel with humorous vignettes lampooning the South, much as we would expect from comedian Flagg, but also with some substance, particularly in the flashbacks. The vignettes in Evelyn's story just take too much time from what substance there might have been in the flashback. I rate _ F _ r _ i _ e _ d _ G _ r _ e _ e _ n _ T _ o _ m _ a _ t _ o _ e _ s a high +1 on

the -4 to
+4 scale.