

They eat worms and they eat dreck and they make their own dreck and they fly around. And for a wild goose that is what life is all about. I want to give you the picture that we are not talking about the world's brightest animal here. If geese gave Nobel Prizes to other geese it would be for not being dumber than a bent

THE MT VOID

Page 2

nail. And most years the prize would go to "No Award."

Some modern cut-up sang the same song to "I won't go where the wild geese go 'cause I know more than a wild goose knows." But you know, this year the geese might have proven me wrong. It may be the geese are smarter than I usually give them credit for being and they may show that not in where they go but when. I have it on good authority that the wild geese flew south a month early this winter. I am told that when the geese go south for the winter early, you could do a lot worse than to go with them. Let's face it, this would have been not such a bad winter to miss. There are aspects of this winter I could have done without. That's not even mentioning my theory that the tectonic plates got cold and contracted and the rest is Los Angeles history. But this was the year I had a crisis of faith over whether THE FORCE is protecting our driveway from the ravages of winter. Longtime readers of these ravings will remember my grouching that once Evelyn was put in charge of deciding when the driveway got done the Powers That Be started protecting our driveway. We got either no snow or a powdered sugar sort of dusting while people around us got the same or considerably worse. It suddenly became unnecessary to do the driveway so often. Most everybody noticed we had a bunch of warm winters. In five or six years I did the driveway once and once we paid someone to do it. That is nothing like how often I usually do it. But this year was the acid test. This year was the year that the heavens threw everything at our driveway they could manage. So far I had to shovel once a light snow that was gone in two days. We probably could have gotten away not doing it, but I had this Crisis of Faith. I was wrong. Evelyn really does have some sort of agreement with the Dark Powers. I am afraid to say any more at this point because I am afraid if I say more she will turn me into a wild goose.

[Note: Guess what? Since I wrote this we got hit again. And guess

who had to do the driveway? Evelyn remained protected; it just didn't apply to me.]

2. BEARS DISCOVER FIRE by Terry Bisson (Tor, ISBN 0-312-85411-0, 1993, 254pp, US\$19.95) (book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Many authors have an interchangeable style. Maybe they learn it in writing workshops or something. Some do more with it than others, but if you took a random paragraph from one, you'd never be able to identify the author.

Not so with Bisson. When you read, "For the first two hours out of Hazard it's nothing but clouds. Flat Mountain's not flat yet and you're riding an 8-percent switchback patched together out of old

highways," you _ k _ n _ o _ w it's Terry Bisson's writing. Bisson writes about trucks and guns and cars and Kentucky. Given today's jargon, I wouldn't be surprised to hear it described as redneckpunk. (Not that there's anything punk about it, but that wouldn't stop anyone.) Many of Bisson's stories are set in Kentucky or environs, and even those that aren't seem to be populated by Kentuckians--even, God help us, "England Underway."

The nineteen stories here range from science fiction to fantasy to horror. Many of Bisson's science fiction stories are in a non-realistic future in which some trend has been exaggerated beyond belief ("Next," "The Toxic Donut," "Partial People," "By Permit Only," and even perhaps "Carl's Lawn & Garden"). These stories are oddly similar to some of Connie Willis's humorous "if-this-goes-on" pieces, and they may be the two leading practitioners of this artform today. Others assume some totally unlikely development ("The Two Janets," "Over Flat Mountain," "Are There Any Questions," "England Underway," and of course the title story "Bears Discover Fire"). And maybe it's just my background, but I see a certain "Twilight Zone" influence in "The Coon Suit," "The Message," "Two Guys from the Future," "Necronauts," and "Press Ann."

I've had the opportunity to hear Bisson read several of these on WBAI radio, and so when I read these stories, it's as if I am hearing him read them, with his slow Kentucky cadences and accent. That's the best way, but even without that I'd recommend this book.

3. THE GUIDE TO LARRY NIVEN'S RINGWORLD by Kevin Stein (Baen, ISBN 0-671-72205-0, 1994, 188pp, US\$14) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

This would more accurately be titled T_h_e_G_u_i_d_e_t_o_L_a_r_r_y_N_i_v_e_n'_s_K_n_o_w_n_S_p_a_c_e, since it covers all of Known Space, not just the Ringworld. Unlike the recent guide to Anne Rice's "universe," this is not arranged encyclopedically. Instead, there are chapters such as "History of Known Space," "Major Races of Known Space," "Aliens of Known Space" (I would think this would have included the preceding chapter), "The Ringworld," "Races of Ringworld," "Psionics," "Equipment," and "Glossary."

This is not designed as a reference book in which to look up things. For example, the glossary gives a two-sentence definition of Kzinti with no reference or pointer to the fourteen pages of text on the Kzinti. Instead it appears to be a book for fans of Known Space to leaf through. The best part may be the illustrations by Todd Hamilton and James Clouse. Of course, I am not especially a fan of Known Space and would prefer to get my series information from the author directly. But even for a fan, I

suspect the approach taken here is too diffuse. Working by analogy, I ask myself what my reaction to a similarly constructed book about Sherlock Holmes would be, and I have to say I would find it of minor interest.

4. There were a couple of errors in the first paragraph of the

review of Nancy Kress's _ A _ l _ i _ e _ n _ s _ o _ f _ E _ a _ r _ t _ h last week. It should have read:

This book of eighteen stories is Nancy Kress's second collection.

(The first, _ T _ r _ i _ n _ i _ t _ y _ a _ n _ d _ O _ t _ h _ e _ r _ S _ t _ o _ r _ i _ e _ s, was published in 1985 by

Bluejay and is out of print.) This one includes the two Hugo-nominated stories "And Wild for to Hold" and "The Mountain to Mohammed." ("And Wild for to Hold" was competing with Kress's "Beggars in Spain" in its year, and when the latter won, Kress was presented with a button that read, "I lost the Hugo to Nancy Kress.")

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The best government rests on the people, and not on the few, on persons and not on property, on the free development of public opinion and not on authority.

-- George Bancroft